

DEATH AND THE DEER HUNTER: CAN MOVIES KILL?

American Film

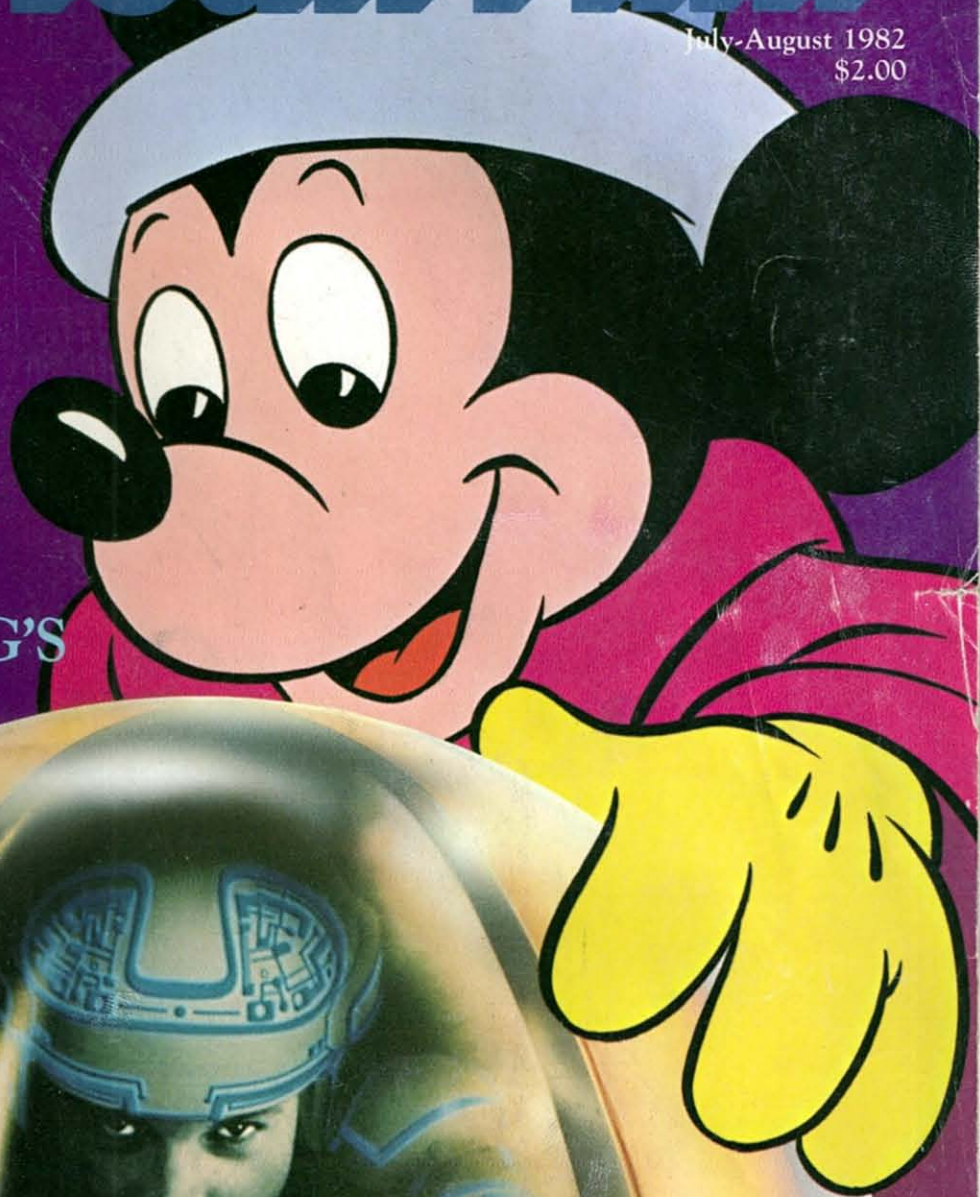
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July-August 1982
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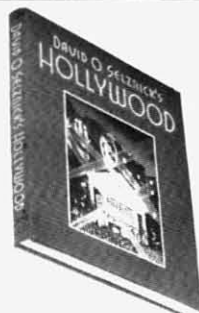
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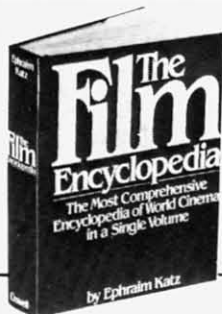
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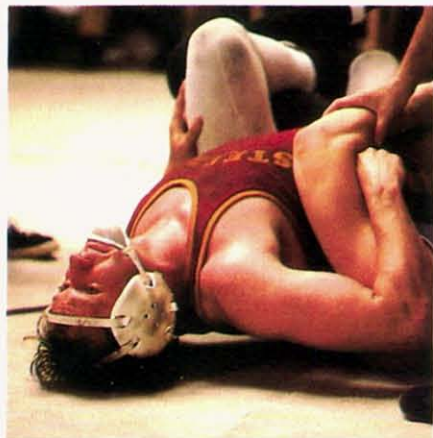
*on leave of absence

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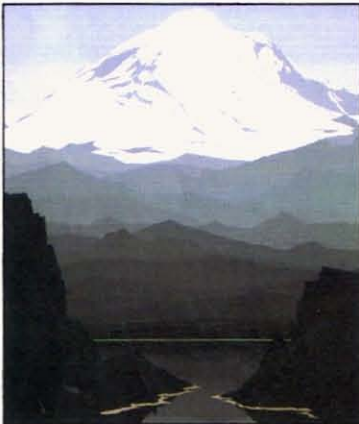
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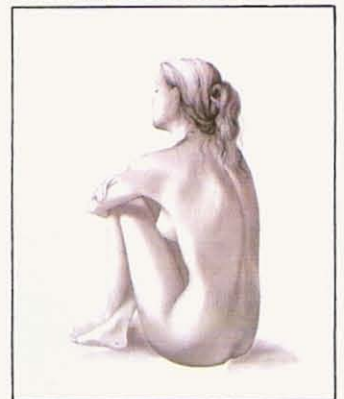
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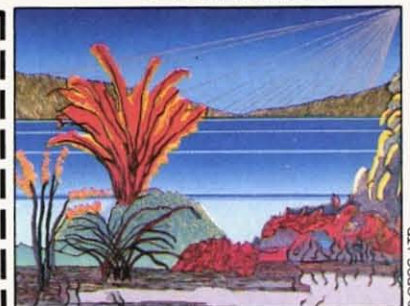
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The Editing Room

The part played by violence in film and television in provoking antisocial behavior in audiences has been the subject of endless, rancorous debate. It is a notoriously slippery area, one that lends itself neither to easy answers nor to the sophisticated techniques of social science.

One of the focal points of this debate is what have come to be known as the *Deer Hunter* shootings, the thirty or so cases of people, many of them children, who apparently mimicked the film's Russian roulette scenes, and either killed or seriously injured themselves. In this issue, journalist Peter Koper explores the alleged relation between *The Deer Hunter* and these incidents.

In the course of his investigation, Koper spoke to approximately fifteen friends and relatives of the victims. Describing his method, Koper says, "I got the names from newspaper clips, and then I simply used the phone book. If there were several entries with the same name, I called all of them. I introduced myself, and when I mentioned *The Deer Hunter*, the right ones knew immediately what I wanted. Some of them didn't want to talk about it; more did. One man met me at the airport because he didn't want his wife to know. Those who cooperated with me seemed to want to get it off their chests. They were searching for a reason and used me as a psychiatrist. There was a great deal of self-blame: 'I shouldn't have had guns in the house'; 'I shouldn't have let him watch the show.' Many of the interviews were conducted through tears. I've worked the police beat, and this was worse. It was one of the toughest stories I've ever done. You feel like a complete voyeur."

Despite the deaths, most of the families Koper interviewed have not gotten rid of their guns, or restricted their children's viewing habits. "In most cases," says Koper, "the guns are part of the household furniture. As far as TV watching goes, one father of an eleven-year-old boy whose brother shot himself told me: 'I try to keep him from watching things. But it's all around you. The people next door have cable. He goes over there to watch. You can't build a wall around your children.'"

Most of the families were lower-middle-class or working-class, and Koper thinks the film's appeal to blue-collar Americans says a lot for Michael Cimino's writing and directing. "The film accurately reflects what those people feel—sadness, a suffocating sense of the burden of life."

Koper once worked for the Associated Press, has free-lanced for several publications, including *Rolling Stone*, the *Washington Star*, and the *Baltimore Sun*, and now teaches journalism at Hofstra University. He does not support efforts to censor violent films or hold the filmmakers responsible. "If a cause-and-effect relation between films and audience response is insisted on, there would not only be no more films, but no newspapers, no books—in short, no communication."

□

We also have a report, in "Newsreel," on *Cross-Examination*, a Polish film dealing with the repression of the Stalinist years. The film was completed in the early weeks of last year's military coup, and is now itself being suppressed. The tale of the film's travail is told by Lawrence Weschler, a *New Yorker* staff writer whose accounts of his travels in Poland, first printed in that magazine, were collected, expanded, and recently published under the title *Solidarity: Poland in the Season of Its Passion* (Simon and Schuster/Fireside). His report on *Cross-Examination* is accompanied by a still from the film smuggled out of Poland. We are publishing both in hopes that international pressure will dissuade the Polish government from destroying the master print.

—Peter Biskind

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Letters

Slippery Logs

American Film's decision to devote substantial space to broadcast deregulation was not only sound but well executed. John S. Friedman's analysis of broadcast deregulation ["Special Report: Letting Go," May] is the best overview of the subject I have seen.

Even so, one significant point merits clarification. Although it may well be true, as Friedman says, that many broadcasters continue to keep program logs as before, this is an argument *for*, not against, continued regulation. After deregulation, such voluntarily produced logs need not follow a standard format and will not be readily available for inspection by listeners or the FCC. While the FCC clucked over the alleged paperwork burden imposed by its logging regulations, Friedman's findings suggest that the incremental cost of regulation was almost zero. Here, too, the FCC has sacrificed an important right of the public's to provide a trivial benefit for broadcasters.

Andrew Jay Schwartzman
Media Access Project
Washington, D.C.

Funny Lady

I enjoyed reading the article on Carol Burnett in the May issue of *American Film* ["Carol Burnett Gets a Kick Out of Annie," Susan Horowitz]. I have always admired her, and during my year as a regular on "Saturday Night Live," I hoped she would guest-host the show.

Ms. Burnett's candor is refreshing and her remarks strike a chord. She said, "We still have a stereotype about funny women being unattractive." The stereotype may still exist, but if she were to go on the local comedy club circuit here in Los Angeles, I'm sure she'd see the new, young, attractive comedienne on stages, night after night, honing and perfecting their acts. A new trend may be in the works.

Gail S. Matthius
Beverly Hills, California

Homophobic "Trailer"

As a member of two minority groups—one underrepresented (even more than blacks) in the film and television industry, and the other misrepresented (often *miss*-represented, unfortunately)—I didn't appreciate the tone of the *Partners* item in the May "Trailers" column.

The writer is coy about the subject of homosexuality in film, referring to it as "certain previously unmentionable subjects." Now that it's mentionable, mention it! He also notes (I'm assuming it's a he, and "straight") that the *Partners* screenplay is by Francis Veber, "who has already displayed a knack for this kind of material," namely *La Cage aux Folles*. Obviously, the writer thinks once you've seen one gay film or written one gay screenplay, you've seen or written them all. *La Cage* was a travesty, totally

misrepresentative of the majority of gay men, here and abroad, while *Partners* is an honest attempt to deal with "mixed" relationships. Next time, a little less stereotyping at *American Film*, please.

Merv Garcia
San Mateo, California

Overexposed

The picture of Nastassia Kinski ("Will Overexposure Spoil Nastassia Kinski," April) is absolutely obscene and a sin. If Richard Avedon has to stoop to this kind of photography, he most certainly no longer qualifies as one of the top photographers in the industry, but rather is a has-been, scraping the bottom of the barrel.

Marcie Kirchner
Los Angeles, California

Pro Theta

The impression left by Jon S. Denny's article "Coming ON Strong" (April), that ON TV and Theta Cable are competitively engaged in attracting subscribers in Los Angeles, is inaccurate and misleading. ON TV, as a through-the-air service, is generally available in all areas of the L.A. market, while Theta and other cable operators are limited to the boundaries of their franchises. In fact, there are still some sections of Los Angeles where ON TV can be received that are not served by any cable operator: The east San Fernando Valley and south central L.A., in particular, represent about a half-million potential subscribers. Therefore, any comparison of figures for a pay-per-view show such as the Rolling Stones concert is just manipulation of numbers to prove a specious point.

ON TV is deluding itself if it thinks the public prefers a single channel over Theta's twenty-nine. Many of my acquaintances are jaded with their steady diet of low-quality movie reruns and incensed at the charges for events such as boxing and music specials. They would change services instantly if a cable operation were available. Living in a noncable area myself, I have steadfastly resisted the door-to-door ON TV salespersons who periodically come around and hawk its virtues. I prefer to spend my twenty-two dollars a month seeing four first-run movies at least a year before they ever appear on ON TV.

Glen King
Panorama City, California

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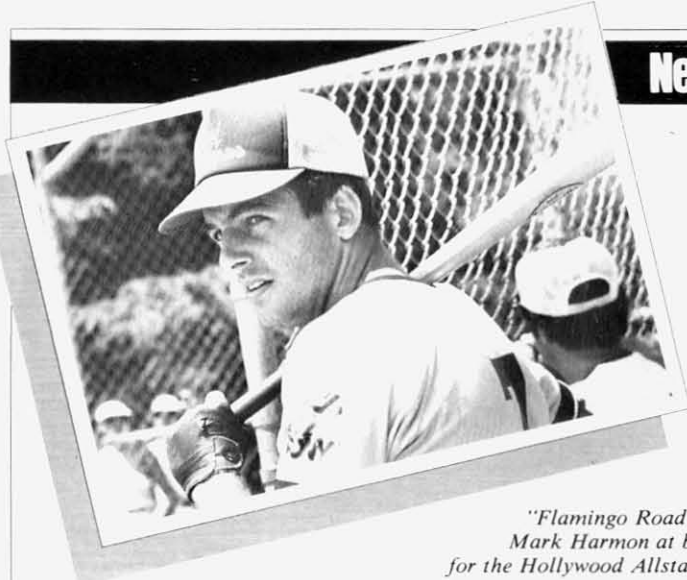
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"Flamingo Road's"
Mark Harmon at bat
for the Hollywood Allstars.

Play Ball!

Despite Los Angeles's reputation as the Land of Total Mellow, it is a fiercely competitive town, especially during softball season. Last year, three thousand people turned out to watch Paramount take on KABC-TV in the Entertainment Industry League championships.

Most of the movie studios field at least one team in the Show-Biz League, Entertainment Industry League, or Motion Picture-Television League, and some sponsor three or four. Horsehide fever also reigns at television production companies (Lorimar, Spelling-Goldberg), talent agencies (ICM, William Morris), and music

companies (CBS-Epic Records).

By many accounts, the Show-Biz League is the most driven of the town's industry-related amateurs. Among Show-Biz's better teams are ICM and William Morris, the Jacksons, and two outfits made up mainly of transplanted New Yorkers—Media Magic and the Coney Island Whitefish, headed by Rob Reiner and Billy Crystal.

Every softball team seems to have a particularly hated rival, the utter humiliation of which is seen as merely its just due. It is hardly surprising that William Morris and ICM take great pleasure in beating each other's brains out—and, in fact, hold a picnic each year to celebrate the occasion. The same kind of

warm goodwill radiates when the Jacksons take on the team from CBS-Epic Records, the group's recording label. And, of course, everyone enjoys taking a swipe at the world-famous Hollywood Allstars.

Founded in 1979, the Allstars are actually two teams—one plays in Los Angeles in the Show-Biz League; the other tours around the country, playing benefits and exhibition games. In order to even qualify for the Allstars' tryouts, an actor must have appeared in a featured role in a motion picture or on television. "Most of these guys played Little League; a few were stars in college," says team coordinator Russ Gill. "They dream of playing sports on a professional level. We're allowing the celebrity to fulfill his fantasy."

But not all Hollywood softball is so seriously competitive. The Magic Castle, for instance, sponsors an all-magician team. Its opponents are liable to be faced with balls that turn into doves or bases that explode. And on any given team, there is a sense of camaraderie. As umpire Bob Sherman puts it, whether you're making \$7,000 a year or \$1.5 million plus points, "everybody's the same once they get out on that ball field." No lights. No camera. Just action.—Ron Mulligan

immolation.

Director Ryszard Bugajski is typical of many of the young filmmakers who came to the fore in Poland during the late seventies and who were so instrumental in the consolidation of public consciousness that led to the formation of Solidarity. Born in 1943, he is only two years older than the regime whose moral disintegration constitutes his overriding theme. (He is, that is to say, exactly the same age as Lech Walesa.)

A member of the generation of 1968 (he was studying philosophy at the University of Warsaw during that year's violent repression of students and intelligentsia), he went on to study filmmaking at the Polish Film School in Lodz, graduating in 1973. He wrote screenplays, directed television productions, and served as assistant director to Krzysztof Zanussi. Following his directorial debut with *A Woman and a Woman* in 1980, he was accepted into "Unit X," Andrzej Wajda's elite corps of filmmakers, which also includes Agnieszka Holland and Feliks Falk.

The division of the Polish film industry into units headed by world-class directors afforded some protection for the more vulnerable filmmakers who belonged to them. The reputations of the unit leaders often shielded politically sensitive projects from bureaucratic interference.

Following August 1980, the Polish film industry played a special role in the sixteen-month odyssey of Solidarity. The film industry was also one of the principal beneficiaries of the renewal it had helped to launch, and Bugajski's new screenplay (begun late in 1980 and completed by the spring of 1981) proved a decisive test case in the rapidly evolving new order.

Even after August 1980, the Ministry of Culture tried to retain the right to veto, in advance, production on any screenplay it found objectionable. And *Cross-Examination* was objectionable, indeed: As originally envisioned, Bugajski's screenplay dealt frankly not only with the story of a woman imprisoned and tortured

Poland Objects to Cross-Examination

The case of *Cross-Examination* (*Przeszuchanie*), Ryszard Bugajski's stark and harrowing feature film dealing with political persecution during the Stalinist years in Warsaw, is emblematic of the fate of Polish film during and immediately after the recent surge of Solidarity.

Although completed this past winter, the film has been shelved by the censors. There are, of course, no plans to sanction the film's release in Poland, and interested American distributors have been informed by Film Polski, the state film-exporting office, that there are no

plans for foreign release, either. Indeed, there is considerable concern in the world film community that *Cross-Examination*, which currently exists ex-

clusively in the form of a single master print locked in a vault at the Polish Ministry of Culture, may be facing not only temporary suppression but permanent



Krystyna Janda in a scene from Bugajski's *Cross-Examination*.

during the early fifties in a Stalinist jail, but also with the fate of her daughter (a child whose father was one of the prisoner's examining magistrates), who grows up to work for one of the underground printing plants active throughout Poland during the late seventies.

The screenplay was vetoed out of hand, but during the spring of 1981, Polish filmmakers used it to wrest a new prerogative from the rapidly retreating Ministry of Culture: the right to veto its veto. With Wajda running interference, Bugajski set about preparing his screenplay for production late in the summer of 1981.

Ironically, the desperate economic crisis that had spawned Solidarity in the first place came to frustrate the project's chances of success. Although Bugajski now had the go-ahead to make *Cross-Examination*, the Polish film industry by mid-1981 was suffering from a desperate shortage of film stock. As filming began in the fall, Bugajski was forced down to a virtual one-to-one shooting ratio, and even so, he ran out of stock before completing shooting.

He sent off an emergency appeal to friends in the West, requesting not money but color film stock. After receiving one thousand dollars' worth (a few hundred meters) in mid-November, he was able to conclude shooting just before the military coup on December 13, which, for the time being at least, crushed Solidarity.

During the first months of the military regime, Bugajski apparently managed to edit the film. Filmmakers and reporters who saw early versions of the film prior to the coup testify to its raw energy and power, and praise the performance of Poland's premier actress, Krystyna Janda (who was featured in both Wajda's *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron*, as well as in István Szabó's Oscar-winning *Mephisto*) in the lead.

In the final version, Bugajski chose to confine the story to the events of the Stalinist fifties. Although *Cross-Examination* is fiction, it is largely drawn from the recollections of people who were in the notorious prison

on Rakowiecka Street in Warsaw. During the late forties and early fifties, the final spasms of Stalinist tyranny occasioned purges throughout Eastern Europe. In Poland in 1951, generals Tatar and Kirchmayer were tried and convicted for high treason and espionage. In a series of "side trials," ninety-one death sentences were issued, of which nineteen were carried out. After 1956, most of the

remaining prisoners were released and fully rehabilitated.

Locked in its vault, *Cross-Examination* replicates the situation of several thousand activists, locked away in detention centers. Since 1951, it would appear, Polish history has gone full circle: This commemorative act of witnessing proved to be a terrible prophecy. But it is precisely in the cyclical nature of Polish history that we may draw

hope.

If it has turned out that we haven't heard the end of Stalinist repression, we may also be certain we haven't heard the end of Solidarity's defiant idealism. Perhaps someday not that far off the release of *Cross-Examination* will signal a new resurgence in a land where the fates of film and politics have become so remarkably intertwined.—Lawrence Weschler

When There Was No Jazz

Feliks Falk, the acclaimed Polish director of *Top Dog* and *Chance*, came to New York from Warsaw in March of 1981. Polish officials allowed him to leave, but did not extend this permission to his latest film, *There Was Jazz*—about Polish musicians playing forbidden music under Stalinism.

Originally a painter, Falk studied at the Polish Film School in Lodz. *Top Dog* was his second feature; he wrote and directed this contemporary portrait of a nightclub entertainer (played by Jerzy Stuhr) whose single-minded ambition leads him to hollow success. Stuhr—a kind of Polish Richard Dreyfuss—won the Best Actor award at the 1979 Chicago Film Festival for the role, one which suggests that Duddy Kravitz has a distant relative in Poland.

Chance (1980) is a moral drama about the tension between two politically symbolic educators: a history teacher (Stuhr) who encourages his students to think for themselves and be skeptical, and a gym teacher who barks orders at his pupils and cares only about winning. The history teacher observes, "I smell an ideology in this game," which is clearly fascism. Not unlike Zanussi's *Camouflage* and Wajda's *The Orchestra Conductor*, Falk's probing study pits an earnest and freethinking individual against a cynical authoritarian.

The following interview was conducted during a train trip from New York to New Haven.

Question: Why are you in the United States?

Feliks Falk: Because the Kosciuszko Foundation invited me. I had been invited to Filmex with my new film, *There Was Jazz*. Finally, the film was not sent by Polish officials, so I couldn't attend the festival. I went anyway, but wasn't an official guest.

Question: Why didn't they let the film out of Poland?

Falk: I wonder myself. The problem is that many films which were released before September are now stopped by censorship, especially films concerning the fifties. As far as I know, my film doesn't include any content which could offend authorities, but maybe they feel a little bit guilty. If the situation there stabilizes, they will show my film as well as others. If not, these films will wait a longer time.

Question: How were you affected, as a filmmaker, by the military crackdown?

Falk: I wasn't affected personally, only as a member of the Polish Film Association. As you probably know, it was closed a week or two after martial law was declared. This made our lives very difficult because we couldn't meet, talk, or arrange things we'd like to do, as we used to.

Generally, film production wasn't stopped, but it was complicated by lack of transportation and communication, especially between towns; films were produced, but it took longer. For example, in my unit there is the film of Janusz Zaorski's, *Mother of Kings*, based on a novel by Kazimierz Brandys, who is also in New York. This screenplay, about the fifties, waited a long time to be accepted. It's strange, but this was

one of the few which were allowed to be shot, just three days after martial law was declared. I don't know about the scripts still to be accepted: The acceptance of scripts stopped.

Question: What exactly is your relationship to Solidarity?

Falk: We were all in Solidarity. Of course, while the Solidarity movement was active, lots of positive changes were made in our film industry. But the contemporary situation stopped the progress. That's why I feel very upset. Now it will take ten years again to convince authorities that some of our ways are really right.

Question: What happened to co-production?

Falk: Because of the problems of transportation, things changed. I was looking for funds for my new project, *Mass for the Town of Arras*. I wanted to shoot it outside of Poland. But now I realize it would be very difficult because nobody wants to give their money. *The Danton Affair* [Wajda's most recent film, starring Gérard Depardieu] was supposed to be shot half in Poland, but now Gaumont has decided to do it all in Paris. Of course, they will also have trouble with the transportation of Polish actors.

Question: When did you complete *There Was Jazz*? Was it difficult to shoot?

Falk: September—it took about five months. The difficult thing is to shoot with music. But I like this music, and it was the symbol of opposition—cultural opposition—in the fifties. Jazzmen had to play underground, in the cellars; it was called "catcomb jazz." They couldn't play concerts. This is placed on a political surface, a historic

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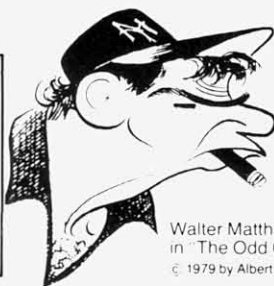
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Walter Matthau
in "The Odd Couple"

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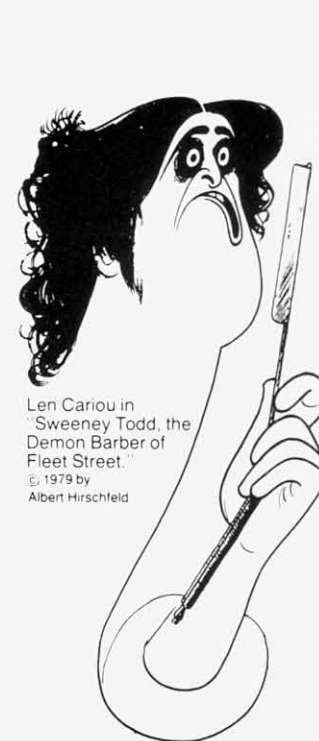
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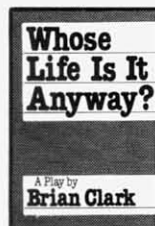


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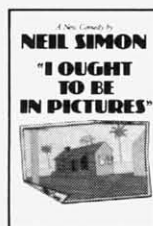


Len Cariou in
"Sweeney Todd, the
Demon Barber of
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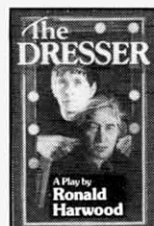
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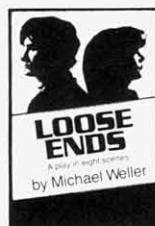
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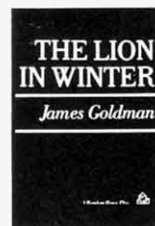


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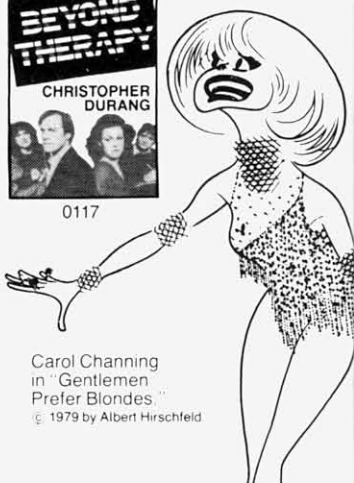
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Carol Channing
in "Gentlemen
Prefer Blondes."

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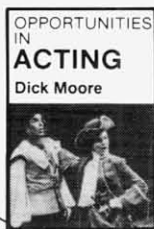
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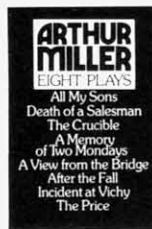
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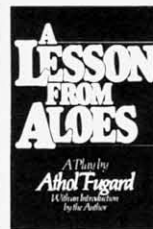
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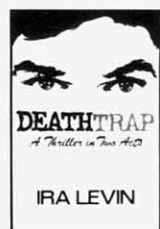
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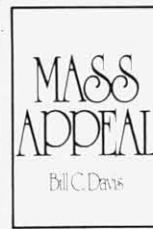
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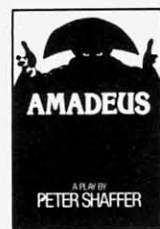
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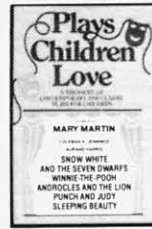
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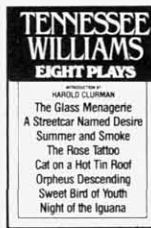
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Elizabeth Ashley in
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Frank Langella
in "Dracula."
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Pythons' Progress

The viewers of *Time Bandits*—the Terry Gilliam and Michael Palin fantasy-adventure film in which six diminutive scene stealers tear through time holes left in the fabric of the Universe when Creation was sewn up as a six-day “rush job”—can look forward to more Python-in-

spired time travels.

Monty Python's comedic giants, including Palin and Gilliam, are jumping into wholly individual projects as well as joining together later this summer to shoot the group's next ensemble feature.

Welshman Terry Jones is leaping into the fourteenth century, working on a script called “1381.” Graham Chapman will sail the high seas with Eric Idle

costume film with obvious contemporary meanings. And, of course, music is also commercial. I'm interested in social-political things, but not in boring the audience. So I use songs, music, sports. *Top Dog* was very well received in Poland. *Chance* was less popular.

Question: How important is popularity in terms of getting support for a subsequent film?

Falk: It's the opposite! If your film is too popular, too commercial, they say, “He's not good” or “What a stupid film.”

Question: Do you perceive any cinematic influences on your work?

Falk: I'm not sure if I have a particular style. I do have a concern with social-political subjects. On the one hand, there are filmmakers I admire for originality, such as Fellini, Buñuel, and Altman. But in my films I try to inject some professionalism, known in Poland as “American professionalism.” It's not because I'm in the U.S. and talking with you that I propose this, but American films, which are often not very artistic, are professional in the way of telling the story, in editing, in observing real life. This has always impressed me and I try to bring it into my films.

Question: Can you talk a bit about your next project, *Mass for the Town of Arras*?

Falk: It's based on the novel by Andrzej Szczypiorski, and the action takes place during the Middle Ages. The story is a situation that takes place throughout world history: taking advantage of people's feelings for the ideological purpose of dogmatic believers. It's about a few people, focusing on a priest, chairman of the county

council, who sees that the religious community is weakened in Arras. He tries to throw the blame on the Jews and the intelligentsia so that the religious community will be restored. This kind of thing happens often and in many places. The second protagonist is his young student, who moves to a critical or negative position. This seems important for our times.

Question: What does the future hold for Polish cinema?

Falk: It's delicate. It's obvious that some of the finished films will have trouble because they tell the truth. *Cross-Examination* is a good and important film for Polish cinema and history as well. It shows for the first time a period of Polish history which was always closed to the public.

Films are in preparation. Agnieszka Holland is writing a script for Wajda to direct on Janusz Korczak [the legendary Polish teacher, social worker, and author who spurned a Nazi offer of freedom to accompany children to their death in a concentration camp]. It will be produced by Walter Bachman, an American living in England.

Question: Is there anything that we can do in the U.S. for Polish film?

Falk: Well, Ron Holloway [the *Variety* critic] came to Warsaw in November with the idea that he would then go to Hollywood and ask for cooperation with the Polish Film Association: first of all for film stock and equipment; second, to support Polish films through coproduction. Now it's very difficult to make such connections. I think that the real censorship which can do harm is the lack of money and film stock. —Annette Insdorf

in *Yellowbeard*, a mad piratical yarn set in 1712. Signed aboard for the ride are Oliver Reed, Peter Cook, Adam (of Adam and the Ants), and a “major international megastar.” The movie, a joint Chapman and Hemdale Film Group production, starts shooting in the fall.

John Cleese has signed up for *Privates on Parade*, the film version of the award-winning black comedy by Peter Nichols that hit London's West End a few seasons back. The movie satirically chronicles the adventures of the queen's entertainment troupe entertaining the troops in post-World War II Singapore.

Terry Gilliam will play the notorious Baron von Munchausen, an incorrigible eighteenth-century liar who's become a popular hero with European children, in a film he's set to produce. “The baron is angry at other people who've elaborated on his stories and undermined his credibility,” Gilliam explains, adding with mock severity, “He only deals with the truth!”

Fantasy versus reality—“and not getting the balance right”—is the basic conflict in a second Gilliam project, tentatively titled “Brazil.” “It's really ‘America,’” admits Gilliam “and it's all about ambition and success.” The plot revolves around a clerk at the Ministry of Torture whose life Gilliam describes as “Walter Mitty meets Franz Kafka.”

Michael Palin is staging a very different morality play with *The Missionary*. Set in Edwardian England, the story is

about the “missadventures” of an archetypal English hero, pressed into service at a home for “fallen women”—with the encouragement of his fiancée, who naively believes that the ladies have “hurt their knees.” He starts out having great fun, but soon ends up in an affair de corpse, after having “gone through every sin in the book,” according to Palin.

“I like these people that appear outwardly to be the hero figure,” Palin adds, “but are consumed by all kinds of gnawing worries and anxieties.” He and director Richard Loncraine hope to have the film finished and edited by summer, in time for the Pythons' team project.

Not averse to basking in the sun, the Pythons gathered at a Caribbean hideaway in January for a final writing session to wrap up their as-yet-untitled movie script. Graham Chapman explains, “It won't be so much of a story line as *Brian* was, probably two or three interweaving stories with a collage of semirelated bits and pieces that hopefully will hang together because it's a limited group of people performing them.”

Referring to the group's zero-to-three tick system for rating their work, Chapman says, “We've got a lot of three-tick material!”

Also on the group agenda is a film highlighting their popular 1980 Hollywood Bowl shows, which were videotaped and then transferred to 35mm film. The eighty-minute film will be released “when we need the money,” says Chapman.

—Yolanda Reid

The Pythons: Cleese, Gilliam, Jones, Chapman, Palin, and Idle.



"Hill Street" Fans Sing Blues

The producers of NBC's much-acclaimed "Hill Street Blues" are discovering that hell hath no fury like a loyal viewer surfeited with reruns.

Mail to MTM Productions has been heavy with outrage—and with good reason: Reruns were frequent throughout the past season, but in the spring they reached a fever pitch—four weeks of reruns in a row, plus a preemption, before a new episode of the police series finally appeared.

What's wrong? For one thing, last year's Writers Guild strike, which meant a late start. "We

were constantly running into a problem of not being able to deliver scripts fast enough to shoot them," explains Gregory Hoblit, one of the show's producers. For another, a dearth at NBC of solid optional programming for holiday periods; a "Hill Street" rerun, the network concluded, would get a stronger rating in the show's Thursday slot than anything else on hand.

But the real problem may be the very thing that keeps fans fiercely loyal: the high quality of the writing. "It takes a good three weeks—at least two and a

half weeks—to write a 'Hill Street,'" says Hoblit. That's about twice as long as it takes for the average television show, he points out, and that's with four staff writers working on a script at full tilt. Each writes one act of the script, and then all four meet with executive producer Steven Bochco to work on revisions. "Then," says Hoblit, "he runs it through the typewriter." On two occasions this year, it became necessary to shut down the "Hill Street" company in order to concentrate on scriptwriting.

As production fell behind—the problem became more severe in the spring—NBC had no choice but to turn to reruns.

Fans, meanwhile, turned to the mails. "They are angry," Hoblit acknowledges, especially when they miss a new episode thinking it's a rerun. "They will readily identify themselves as college educated and middle-class, and pride themselves on their selective viewing. Very often the letters are not only literate, but they're typed."

Next fall, however, "Hill Street" viewers may have less reason to cry the rerun blues. Until now, the show has been written largely in-house. For the coming season, Hoblit says, four or five scripts will be farmed out—under the kind of firm supervision that would please "Hill Street's" Furillo.

Commercial Potential

As our television screen goes blank and we hear the ominous promise, "We'll be right back," most of us make a beeline for the refrigerator or bathroom. But last February, for the second time in two months, some eight hundred people lined up in a cold rain outside the Bottom Line, New York City's premier showcase nightclub, and waited patiently to see two sold-out shows of *Commercial Interruptions—An Evening of Nothing But...*

The revue, a combination of taped commercials and specially written live material, is, in the words of Bottom Line co-owner Stanley Snadowsky, "a very affectionate look at the art of TV commercials."

The show is written by, directed by, and features actor Paul Dooley (*Breaking Away*, *Popeye*), a veteran of more than a thousand commercials, in which he has portrayed one of the Smith Brothers, supplied the voice of a wallet, and sold Skippy dog food from inside a dog suit, among other things. Onstage with Dooley are Bob Kaliban, one of the industry's leading voice-over specialists—who has lately been urging Bell Telephone customers to "pick me up!"—and Lynne Lipton, another ad veteran.

Dooley feels "the old com-

mercials are like golden oldies. When we hear them, we remember where we were and what was going on in our lives."

Last June, Showtime, the national pay television service, aired "We'll Be Right Back," a ninety-minute special produced by Spike Jones, Jr., and hosted by Avery Shreiber and Christina Ferrare. Showtime calls it a retrospective of two hundred of "the world's most memorable commercials... from their origins in the 1940's through the present," and includes such "stars" as Speedy Alka-Seltzer, the Marlboro Man, and Kool's Willie the Penguin.

Both the Bottom Line and Showtime include European spots in their presentations. "Commercials were an art form in Europe long before they were considered as such in the U.S.," observes Caroline Winston, Showtime's vice-president of program development, East Coast.

Johnny Carson has been airing clips of international award-winning commercials on "The Tonight Show" for some time, and in May, Carson Productions' "Television's Greatest Commercials" was aired on NBC. The one-hour special—a first for network television and the leadoff in a projected series of similar specials—was organized around such themes as "women in commercials," "the greatest jingles," and "unforgettable characters."

At the Bottom Line, discus-



Speedy Alka-Seltzer stars in nostalgic commercial revival.

sions are now under way with Broadway producers Elizabeth McCann and Nelle Nugent (*Dracula*, *Amadeus*, *The Elephant Man*) to take the revue to Broadway this fall. "The history of commercials is a capsule history of this country's social life and our way of looking at things over the years," says McCann. She also points out that "those appearing in commercials have probably been in our living rooms more than most TV stars."

Many of today's leading film directors got their basic training in commercials. Michael Cimino, Richard Lester, Dick Richards (*The Culpepper Cattle Company*), and Howard Zieff (*Private Benjamin*) all did television ads in their early days. "People look down on commercials," observes Dooley, "but man for man there's as

much talent in good commercials as there is in good films." Allan Pepper, the Bottom Line's other owner, agrees: "When people respond to a commercial, whether it's to the humor or a unique special effect, it's the same response as when something of quality happens in any good film."

Yes, commercials can be obnoxious, patronizing, and sexist. But within the mire of fatuous jingles, contrived demonstrations, silly slogans, and inane situations, there is a creative core running through these thirty- and sixty-second wonders that have, in the words of a Showtime representative, "sold and cajoled TV watchers over the years." And though we may be loath to admit it, more and more that core is starting to become recognized as Art.

—Cary Pepper

**THIS MONTH, MCA DEALS
YOU NOT ONLY TWO JACKS,
BUT THREE QUEENS,
AND AN ACE.**



Take a look at the latest lineup from MCA Video and you'll see six Academy Award Winning performers, seven all-star pictures, and a full house of hits.

Including Sissy Spacek and Jack Lemmon in *Missing*, the new smash hit about Americans caught in a foreign military coup. Jack Nicholson in the acclaimed and controversial *The Border*. And Gene Hackman and Barbra Streisand in the warm and zany *All Night Long*.

Plus George Segal and Natalie Wood as *The Last Married Couple in America*. An ace performance by Robert Redford in *The Great Waldo Pepper*. Lorne

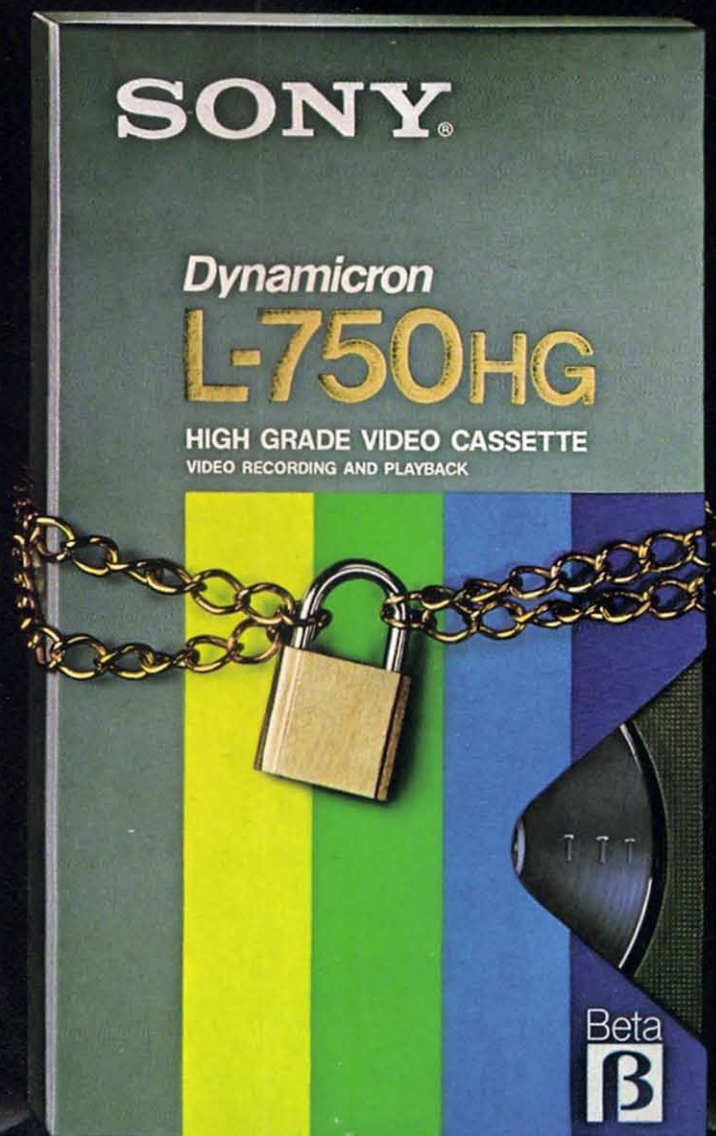
Greene in the sci-fi thriller, *Conquest of the Earth*. And two fisted dynamo Al Thomas demonstrating the fascinating *The World of Martial Arts* in a complete guide to self-defense, beneficial for novices as well as the advanced.

Month after month MCA Video consistently brings you more of the great entertainment you're looking for. New movies, classics, original productions. So stop by your nearest video dealer and get your hands on the hottest deal in town. MCA Video. The best in take-home entertainment.

MCA
70 Universal City Plaza
Universal City, CA 91608
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SONY INTRODUCES A VIDEOTAPE THAT'S ALMOST TOO GOOD TO USE.



New Dynamicron High Grade is a bit like the family silver: it's meant for truly special occasions.

You see, *regular* Dynamicron, the best-selling Beta tape, is perfect for most recording needs. But there are times when you may need something even better. Like when you're making a home movie of a special occasion and want a master tape to make duplicates. Or when picture and sound quality are critical. Or if you want (and can afford) to always use the very best.

Sony Dynamicron High Grade has even better picture and better audio quality than our superb regular Dynamicron. It's got higher picture resolution at each

recording speed. So you can tape at the Beta III speed and get a picture that's the same quality as recording regular Dynamicron on Beta II. It begins with a better picture, and it stays that way longer.

So when you need a superior Beta tape, get Sony Dynamicron. And when you need a *superior* superior Beta tape, get new Sony Dynamicron High Grade. It's a fine distinction.



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VIDEOFILE

TED TURNER BATTENS DOWN THE HATCHES

Jon S. Denny

STORM WARNING AHEAD: A NEW SATELLITE SERVICE THREATENS TO CAPSIZE HIS NEWS FLAGSHIP

On June 1, 1980, Ted Turner launched the world's first twenty-four-hour-a-day television network devoted exclusively to news. Today, twelve million households receive Cable News Network, and after sustaining a \$10 million loss in its first year of operation, CNN may break even this year.

But on June 21, 1982, Turner began facing the greatest challenge of his tempestuous career when Satellite News Channels—a venture undertaken by Westinghouse's Group W Satellite Communications and ABC Video Enterprises—started service to cable households: the first-ever twenty-four-hour-a-day, ad-supported news service not owned by the Turner Broadcasting System.

Patterned after the Group W all-news radio, Satellite News Channel I offers the day's top stories in eighteen-minute cycles, using footage provided by ABC News and cutting away for five minutes each hour to offer regional reports from twenty-four designated areas. (Satellite News Channel II, premiering in early 1983, will be programmed by ABC News and will feature longer and more in-depth reports.) The ABC-Westinghouse channel is being offered free to cable operators, while CNN charges most cable companies fifteen to twenty cents a subscriber per month. Turner's charges are lower for large customers and those who also receive his WTBS superstation out of Atlanta.

To Turner's advantage in the upcoming fight for dominance is the considerable loyalty he has built up among cable operators, many of whom consider him the

spokesman and soul of the entire industry. As a cable pioneer, Turner commands much more loyalty than Westinghouse or ABC, latecomers from broadcasting—an interest group that has traditionally opposed the expansion of the cable industry. Turner's operation also has the advantage of reaching subscribers through Satcom IIIR, the satellite received by the large majority of cable systems. Satellite News Channel I is being delivered courtesy of a Westar satellite, available to only a limited number of systems. For these reasons, many believe that the franchise Turner has created will be very difficult to dislodge. Inevitably, of course, money talks. If the new channel is offered to cable operators free, why should they pay for CNN?

Less than two days after ABC and Westinghouse announced their plans, Turner countered with his own plan for a second news service, called Cable News Network 2. A twenty-thousand-square-foot prefab-

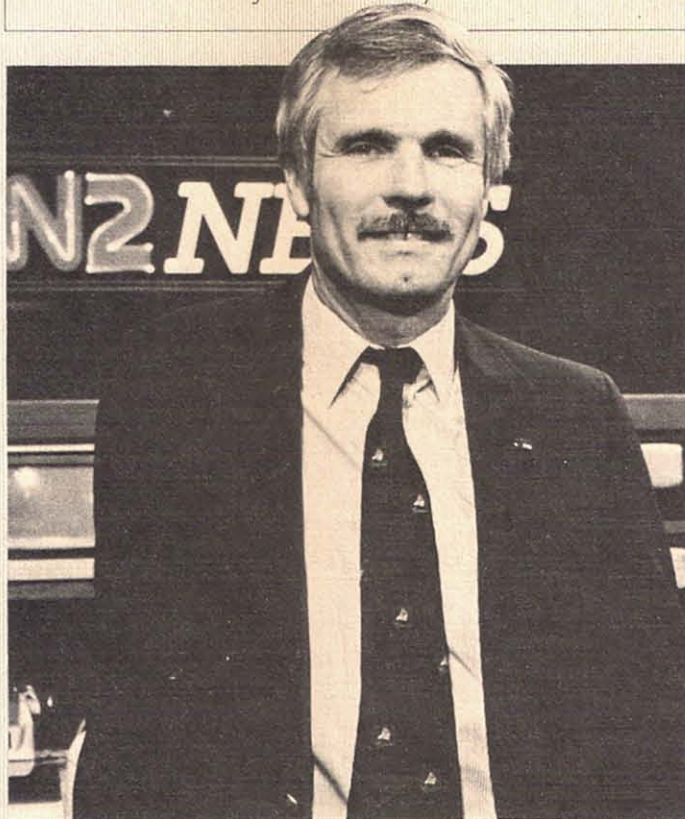
ricated headquarters was set up in Atlanta in ten weeks; on New Year's Eve, with a staff of 160, CNN2 began operation. Structured along the lines of a headline service, with no feature stories or behind-the-scenes coverage, the new network relies on film footage from its big brother for its twenty-four-minute news segments. Six minutes of every half hour are available for use by local cable systems as they see fit.

Turner is offering CNN2 free of charge to cable operators who take CNN and has thus far signed up systems that together represent one and a half million homes. "Ours was a preemptive strike," he explains. "We wanted to keep the competition from establishing a beachhead in cable news. So we pushed up our plans for a second service, gave it away free, and now ABC is worried as hell." Turner likes to portray the confrontation as a classic example of big corporate money moving in on the smaller entrepreneur.

"Actually," he adds, "I don't think [Satellite News] will ever get off the ground. And even if it does, ABC is in the habit of canceling things that don't succeed quickly. I think they'll cancel this, too."

"Cable TV is an on-demand commodity, and I don't think CNN is meeting the needs of the subscriber," counters Herbert Granath, president of ABC Video Enterprises. "They do these long features, and it's very frustrating when you want to know: Has the bomb fallen? Is it safe to go to the stores? I admit that Turner has some loyalty among the old-line operators, but the days of the good-ole-boy concept are over. We don't intend to put him out of business, but I think we're offering a better-quality service under a more attractive deal."

It's too soon to tell whether cable operators and subscribers will find Westinghouse and ABC's deal more attractive, but already some of Turner's CNN staff seem impressed. By May, CNN had lost two on-air reporters and several top technicians to the competition's higher salary offers.



Handy Taylor/Sygma

Turner faces his corporate competitors from the unlikely vantage of an antebellum mansion in the *serious* South. His office, complete with a wet bar and bookcases full of yachting trophies, is nestled inside Turner Broadcasting headquarters in downtown Atlanta, the heart of the Confederacy. From the outside, R. E. Turner's HQ, as they call it, would never be confused with CBS's Black Rock, or the other network headquarters, for that matter. The entrance is a long, U-shaped drive that leads to an impressive portico, inside of which is a lobby set off by Corinthian columns. The mansion, which cost Turner \$8.5 million to acquire and refurbish, sits on thirty-eight green acres. It looks like a country club, which is precisely what it was before he moved in.

As Turner tells it, the history of Turner Broadcasting, of which he himself owns eighty-seven percent, is a testimony to the great man's tenacity and foresight. In moments of maximum self-absorption, Turner calls himself a visionary. "If Christopher Columbus had a southern accent," he declares, "then I'd be the man." Besides Columbus, he compares himself to Galileo, Robin Hood, Jiminy Cricket, and William S. Paley. "This Paley guy sounds kind of interesting," Turner has said. "Maybe we ought to have lunch sometime. But it can't be right away, because I'm busy as hell." Most of his enemies and a good many of his friends think Turner has all the southern charm of a rattlesnake, with a tougher skin to boot. "I don't care what people say about me," he answers critics. "I'm too busy making history."

Back in 1969, Turner owned a small billboard advertising company, which he had rebuilt after his father's suicide six years earlier. Anxious to widen his horizons, the then thirty-two-year-old entrepreneur ignored his advisers and purchased WTCG-TV, Channel 17, an independent Atlanta UHF station whose virtues were, at the time, next to invisible. It was losing half a million dollars a year and was last in a market dominated by three network stations and containing another independent. The station's signal was weak and often distorted.

Offsetting an initial loss of two million dollars with the strength of his billboard revenues, Turner bought up a slew of cheap rerun sit-coms, and began stocking his old movie collection, which now numbers four thousand titles. When the local ABC affiliate was forced by the network to run news at 6:00 P.M., Turner countered with "Star Trek," picking up a big audience that didn't want news with dessert. Later, the local NBC affiliate refused to air several new network shows, so Turner bought them up and took out huge ads proclaiming: "The NBC Network Moves to Channel 17."

Soon the station was garnering an impressive sixteen percent share of the Atlanta television audience. From the beginning,

"OURS WAS A PREEMPTIVE STRIKE. WE PUSHED UP OUR SECOND SERVICE, GAVE IT AWAY FREE, AND NOW ABC IS WOR- RIED AS HELL."

however, Turner's eye was fixed on an audience much vaster than that in his hometown. Six months after buying WTCG, he purchased another independent television station, WRET in Charlotte, North Carolina, but that was hardly the limit of his vision. He was acutely aware of the emerging frontier called cable television.

In 1975 the FCC lifted restrictions on cable development. Turner testified in favor of cable deregulation, prompting charges of treason from fellow independent broadcasters. The battle lines between cable operators and broadcasters had been drawn years before. Turner was the first broadcaster to turn against his own kind. The other pivotal event in 1975 was the launching of RCA's first domestic satellite, Satcom I, into a geosynchronous orbit 22,300 miles above the equator. Turner was one of the first to recognize the satellite's potential. On December 17, 1976, WTCG (now WTBS) began to beam its signal to the satellite full time.

Before Satcom, the broadcast range of Turner's station had been forty-five miles on a good day. The satellite instantly increased the channel's coverage to well over ten million square miles. With a \$750,000 earth-to-satellite transmitter (earth station) and a \$1 million contract for the use of Satcom I, Turner initiated the original "superstation"—and touted it as the "Fourth Network." Thus, the curious phenomenon of Atlanta Braves fans in Alaska developed.

When the superstation began transmitting by way of satellite, it was received by four cable systems totaling twenty-four thousand viewers. Today it is in more than twenty-one million television households throughout the fifty states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands; and Turner estimates that number will double by 1985. Along the way, Turner has attracted close to two hundred national advertisers and has roused the wrath of Hollywood-based program suppliers, who are demanding that Turner be forced to pay special rates rather than local station rates for the privilege of rerunning their shows nationwide. Basically, the studios feel that the superstation's national reach unfairly inhibits them in selling their syndicated programs in markets where Channel 17 is received. A number of studios and syndicators refuse to sell any syndicated

product to Turner.

The "Fourth Network"—or the "Great American Alternative," as Turner sometimes calls it—includes such television chestnuts as "Leave It to Beaver," "The Munsters," and "Gomer Pyle" as a hefty portion of its daily programming fare. "Gomer Pyle" is a program that stresses value," Turner says. "I mean, he was always doing something nice. He came out on top all the time, even though Sergeant Carter was always giving him trouble. Gomer Pyle is pro-social! The typical network mentality is to be number one in the ratings irregardless of what you have to do, and that's why so much sex, violence, antisocial behavior, and stupidity has taken over the networks. The networks should put a disclaimer on their product, saying, 'Watching this is dangerous to your mental health.'"

With a southern preacher's fire and brimstone, Turner raises his voice: "I'm going after the networks! All they're doing now is reacting to me. I give them hell because they don't serve the public interest. They look at the viewer the same way a slaughterhouse looks at its pigs and cattle. They sell them by the pound to the advertiser—the same way they sell ham hocks and spareribs."

Turner, of course, is not opposed to courting advertisers on Madison Avenue. He reeled with delight when his superstation became the first television program service, after the broadcast networks, to qualify for metered research by A.C. Nielsen. The first Nielsen survey uncovered an audience at least sixty percent larger than Turner had been able to claim before, and Turner raised his ad rates and fattened his cash flow. "We give 'em numbers but we have standards of quality," he says. "I mean, we're trying to do a conscientious, good job. That's a higher consideration than how much money we make." So Turner wouldn't air reruns of, say, "Three's Company" should it be made available to him? "I wouldn't touch it. I wouldn't touch 'The Dukes of Hazzard' or 'Love Boat' or any of that junk. We run old movies, we run sports, and we run shows with value. Like 'Andy Griffith,' 'The Brady Bunch,' and 'The Flintstones.' There's nothing wrong with that."

"Every now and then, the networks do something decent," Turner admits. "But mostly they bring us Mr. Whipple squeezing toilet paper and Charlie's Angels in their underwear. People watch those shows, but people take cocaine, too. That doesn't make it right." Turner pauses for emphasis. "The networks make heroes out of criminals! They're worse than the Mafia!"

When the Satellite News Channels were announced, Turner reacted with typical brashness: He tried to shout the competition out, he threatened antitrust suits, he raged to the FCC about Westinghouse's acquisition of Teleprompter cable systems, and he claimed he could whip anyone. Ironi-

cally, it was the sale of his Charlotte television station to Westinghouse some two years earlier that generated the necessary cash flow to start Cable News Network. Still, Turner has played up the "conflict of interest" angle when discussing the new threat.

And the self-styled maverick questions ABC's journalistic integrity. "The ABC people have said that they're gonna save the major stories for their network 'World News Tonight.' Boone Arledge said that. [ABC denies making such statements.] Never in the history of journalism has someone started an endeavor by saying they were going to withhold important stories. Do you really think they'll let the Satellite News Channels have a story right away when the network wants a scoop?"

"If a story occurs, it will be on the Satellite News Channels a helluva lot faster than on CNN," counters William Scott, president and chief operating officer of Satellite News. "We are the leaders in broadcast news, and we have more access to news than Turner has. He's getting desperate, so he feels compelled to say things which aren't accurate."

Scott joined Group W in 1974 as executive editor of WINS-AM in New York, and he defends his journalistic integrity, as well as that of the Satellite News Channels. "If we're talking about conflicts of interest, which don't exist within our organization, check to see what Turner's doing with CNN2, a poor-quality operation which was a hurried effort to do what they thought we would do."

Turner has begun selling CNN2 to commercial television stations, and some network affiliates are buying. They use the new service to decrease their dependence on the networks' news departments and to secure a viable alternative in case the networks try to grab more station time for the expansion of their nightly news.

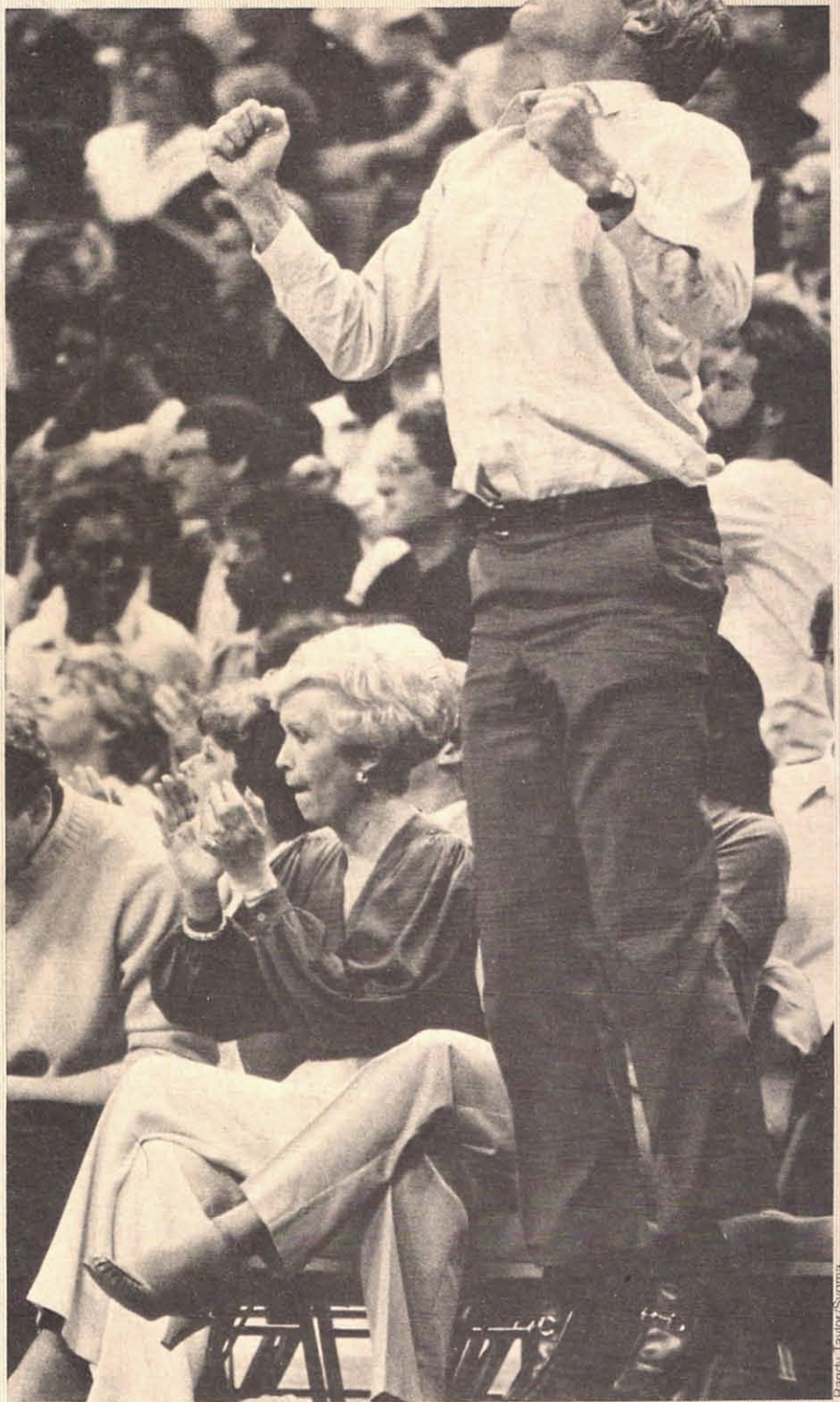
"Ted Turner has turned his back on the cable industry," Scott charges. "He talks about cable establishing its own news entity, special and apart, and then he sells it to broadcast stations."

"Cable News Network 2 was offered free to cable operators, so we felt we weren't taking anything out of their pockets," Turner replies. "And Cable News Network is *not* available anywhere but on cable. And it'll stay that way."

"ABC, don't forget, has vulgarized everything they've put their hands on—especially news," adds Reese Schonfeld, former president of Cable News Network. "They originated the 'happy news' syndrome. The only question is: How cheap will they get with this one?"

Despite the tough talk, Ted Turner finds himself in an awkward position these days as the guru of cable news. It was just a few years ago that he said, "No news is good news," and broadcast Channel 17's news reports at three o'clock in the morning.

Happy news? His news anchorman once read his entire program while holding a



Ted Turner hopes to raise his ratings higher than he can jump.

photograph of Walter Cronkite in front of his face. The same newsman once wore a gorilla outfit while reading the story of a guerrilla attack, and occasionally welcomed a German shepherd as his co-anchor. He also let loose with a more than occasional flying cream pie.

Turner says ABC's news-gathering force doesn't faze him at all. "ABC jumped on the bandwagon, and the Satellite News Channels will be an absolute disaster," he con-

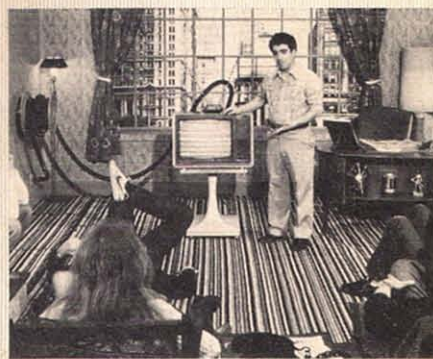
cludes. Industry analysts, however, have suggested that if ABC and Westinghouse proceed as planned, Turner could ultimately be forced to seek a more powerful financial partner in order to compete effectively with the giants. He has already turned down a proposal from CBS.

"Sell out?" he says, smiling a toothy grin. "Don't forget who you're talking to!"

Jon S. Denny is a writer and television producer.

SCANLINES

INTERACTIVE FABLE



© Kevin Noble 1992

Mike, in his normal habitat.

Considering cable television's rapid expansion, somewhere the wires were bound to get crossed. But imagine the reaction of a slow-on-the-uptake bachelor named Mike when he realizes that his new cable connection, far from bringing him the latest in programming, is carrying his banal private life—live from his living room—to the cable world beyond.

Mike is as thunderstruck as a caveman discovering a mirror, but appears willing to adjust to status as a cable star in *It Starts at Home*, a half-hour color video comedy featuring thirty-one-year-old performance artist Michael Smith. Paced as a parody of network sit-coms, with sly visual wit and a complex sound track that mixes Mike's stream of consciousness, original music, and the rapid chatter of a high-pressure producer (portrayed by a cigar-smoking piece of fur), *It Starts at Home* premiered earlier this year at the Whitney Museum's "New American Filmmakers" series.

For a month, every hour on the hour, the program aired there on the home console in the living room set where it was filmed.

Museum patrons entered the video environment through a mock-up of Mike's suburban backyard, past his kitchen sink, to sit in his living room and watch Mike's story on the very television that started watching him. To heighten the show-within-a-show effect, Smith frequently visited the installation, more or less in character. That character, a bushy-browed lonely guy, has been refined by Smith over six years of appearances in galleries, museums, and rock clubs across the United States, Europe, and Canada. Mike often sits and waits. He's given parties attended only by Donny and Marie Osmond (portions of that program were prerecorded); and in an earlier, thirteen-and-a-half-minute video effort, *Secret Horror*, Mike was terrorized by a ringing telephone, a ceiling that threatened to come down, and imaginary ghosts.

Now, having scared up a team of more than two dozen artists, writers, and technicians (headed by director Mark Fischer) to create a slick, full-scale production, Smith is eager to do more. He's in search of a sponsor for further "Mike shows"—*It Starts at Home* was funded by an artist-in-residence grant from WXXI-TV (Rochester, New York) and privately borrowed money.

"We have outlines for two or three shows," Smith explains, "and I want to complete another half-hour tape before this kind of material turns up on 'Late Night With David Letterman' or somewhere else. The ideas are in the air."

And on the road. Following its Whitney debut, Smith took *It Starts at Home* and his eccentric performance routines on tour to Ohio colleges, a Chicago art gallery, San Francisco's La Mamelles arts center, the Long Beach Museum of Art, St. Paul's Film in the Cities, and other showcases.

—Howard Mandel

EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION

"I'm a good list maker," says Richard Stadin, a latter-day Pliny the Elder whose dream is a vast compendium of knowledge on videotape. The former Timex executive released his first MasterVision titles in time for Christmas last year, and today he offers fifty-three cassettes in twenty-two categories ranging from dance to drama, from gymnastics to geology.

Stadin's home video curriculum includes dramatizations of John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* and *Aesop's Fables*, as well as the Emmy-winning version of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, featuring Hal Holbrook and Barbara Bel Geddes, and a Chekhov trilogy narrated by John Gielgud. Arnold Schwarzenegger stars in *Mr. Olympia*, the story of the seventh annual worldwide body-building contest, and a ten-cassette

series examines the history of this country from colonial times through World War II. MasterVision also offers lessons in such subjects as astronomy, biology, karate, horticulture, linguistics, and religion. Stadin plans to update his catalog regularly, adding titles and redefining categories. Prices range from \$59.95 to \$69.95 in both Beta and VHS formats.

Stadin hopes his collection will fill "a programming void" left by public television budget cuts and commercial television's "minimal concern for its level of taste."

Pliny the Elder, the Roman naturalist who created the world's first encyclopedia, died of asphyxiation while investigating eruptions near Vesuvius. So far, Richard Stadin's risks have only involved dealing with agents and distributors.

RE-STOOGES

Throwing pies and poking fingers in each other's eyes, the Three Stooges entertained moviegoers in the thirties, forties, and fifties, television viewers in the sixties, and now a new generation of fans who have been enjoying the recycled slapstick on videocassettes.

From the early thirties through the fifties, Moe, Larry, Curly, et al, made almost two hundred short films, most of them stockpiled by Columbia Pictures. The studio's Home Entertainment division has collected the best of the Stooges in four hour-long cassettes, with a fifth due for release later this year. At \$49.95 per tape, the series sells as well as, if not better than, major new films released for video.

"It's classic humor which can be enjoyed over and over again," says Robert Blattner, vice-president of Columbia Pictures Home Entertainment and a Stooges



Larry, Moe, and Curly.

fan himself. Blattner won't release sales figures, but does say that college students and people in their twenties who were too young to watch the Stooges in the theaters are the chief agents of the revival, which has also spawned a Three Stooges fan club, with eight thousand members, and a variety of paraphernalia that includes watches, dolls, pajamas, and underwear.

Parents with young children are also buying and renting the cassettes. "There's a limited amount of children's material available on tape," explains Frank Barnako, owner of the Video Place chain in the Washington, D.C., area. Barnako's sales staff are great Stoogeophiles themselves, he says, and often play the Columbia cassettes as in-store demonstrations.

Moe's daughter Joan and her husband, Norman Maurer, are taking off on the new Stooges mania, planning prime-time television specials, a documentary, and even a slapstick musical for Broadway. Maybe this is what Olivia Newton-John meant when she said, "Let's get physical."

LIGHT CAMERA ACTION

In the fifties and sixties, every self-respecting middle-class family took home movies—recording birthday parties, trips to the beach, graduations, and hula hoop marathons for the future delight of the grandchildren. But the color faded before the grandchildren materialized. Times have changed, and now video technology is fast replacing Super-8, making television producers out of daddies who would once have worked only in film.

The Wolfman Report, which publishes photography industry statistics, sees sales of videotape cameras and recorders continuing to boom as sales of motion picture cameras decline. In 1980, 115,000 video cameras were sold, up from 73,000 in 1979. About 180,000 movie cameras were sold in 1981, down from 609,000 in 1977 and 1,043,000 in 1972.

Last year, Kodak abandoned the movie camera market completely, having already stopped production of new cameras in September 1980. The company blamed dwindling sales on the development of easy-to-use still-photography equipment such as cartridge-loading, instant, and 35mm cameras, the drop in the birthrate, and the growth of video technology. Kodak's decision to call it a day came on the heels of Polaroid's dismal experience with its Polavision home movie system, introduced in 1976. By 1981, the company had lost \$68.5 million. Part of the reason for Polavision's failure was its \$700 price tag.

Although video requires a larger initial investment (at least \$1,500 for a recorder and camera, compared with about \$200 for a cheap movie camera and projector), it's more economical in the long run. Video also offers instant playback gratification—no more sending film off to a lab, waiting for it to be developed, and setting up the screen and projector. So another American ritual changes. And because film is harder to store and more vulnerable than videotape, many young stars of fifties home movies, now grown up, are transferring their memories to cassettes, in case the grandchildren ever want to see them.

REAL NEWS?

Cableshows, a new independent production company in Van Nuys, California, is taking "Saturday Night Live's" "Weekend Update" a step further with "Real News, Real News," a comic look at current events that combines fact with fiction. "It's part '60 Minutes,' part 'Candid Camera,' part 'ABC World News Tonight,'" says Cableshows' vice-president Tracy Cabot.

The half-hour series will create its own news as well as cover actual news events, not unlike some regular news broadcasts. "The segments may be real or not," says Cabot. "Nobody knows until the end credits." We can't wait to see how "Real News, Real News" handles nuclear-disaster stories.

GROWING UP WIRED

Deirdre Boyle



Paula Court

KIT FITZGERALD AND JOHN SANBORN WERE RAISED ON TELEVISION. NOW THEY'RE MAKING IT.

Who are the cover-girl beauty and the guy with the rapier wit, and why is everyone talking about them as if they were video art's Great White Hope? Kit Fitzgerald and John Sanborn's tapes—such as *Olympic Fragments*, *Resolution of the Eye*, and *Interpolation*—have been appearing everywhere, on CBS Cable and USA Network, on television in Tokyo and Paris, in New York City rock clubs, and at other more predictable video art venues like the Kitchen, the Whitney Museum of

American Art, and public television.

From their modest beginnings in 1976 with little money and an oddly ritualistic approach to video (they carted monitors through deserted downtown Manhattan streets in a manner more reminiscent of medieval penitents than avant-garde artists), the young couple went on to discover state-of-the-art technology at WNET's TV Lab in 1978, to launch a new style, and to make video history by dazzling the art world and catching the attention of the folks with deep pockets in the cable, cassette, and disc industries.

Most recently, these avant-garde trouperers, with their legendary skills at self-promotion, have sieged the fortress of the brashest of the brash—the music business. Sanborn calls Antarctica, their just-launched video and record production company, "as far away from the mainstream as you can get without actually leaving the planet." At the same time, he expects to sell both records and videotapes at Sam

SANBORN IS FOND OF SAYING, "EITHER YOU CAN QUOTE 'WINKY DINK' [THE FIRST "INTERACTIVE" TELEVISION SHOW FOR KIDS] OR YOU CAN'T."

Goody's. In June, Antarctica issued its first releases: an album by the Love of Life Orchestra, as well as a tape, *Siberia*; an album by Jill Kroesen called *Stop Vicious Cycles* and a video single, *The Secretary Song*; and an album by David Van Tieghem.

Fitzgerald and Sanborn hope that their innovative approach to "new music" will help distinguish them from the mass of other video artists. Both think they have more in common with musicians than with visual artists, in terms of the process—working with tape, mixing, and editing—and the outlets for their work. "Musicians—from new musicians to rock 'n' rollers—are dealing with their product seriously as an art form, but also as a crossover into popular culture," Fitzgerald notes.

Sanborn, in particular, has been working with musicians. *Ear to the Ground*, made with David Van Tieghem, is a four-minute tape that "Saturday Night Live" has been eyeing. In it, Van Tieghem literally drums Manhattan's sidewalks, metal grills, fire-plugs, phone booths, and lampposts in a percussionist's equivalent of Gene Kelly's virtuoso dancing in *Singin' in the Rain*. Sanborn, in editing, has given this im-

promptu, one-take performance breathless movement; and the piece closes with a split-second montage that both recapitulates the performance and serves as a classic Sanborn signature.

Fitzgerald and Sanborn, at twenty-eight and twenty-seven respectively, have evolved their own video style, which they call "visual humming." It combines the visual vocabulary of television—rapid editing, unusual juxtapositions, special effects—with the rhythms of "new music" to produce synergistic, multitextured, unconventional narratives that are as entertaining as they are provocative. Visual humming amounts to more than catchy visuals that accompany music—something that is anathema to Sanborn. He dislikes those "stupid pictures," those redundant images that merely reinforce lips moving or fingers strumming a guitar. Instead, he and Fitzgerald look for new ways to interpret sounds visually, wedding image to music in such a way that "the entire process becomes stuck in your mind, and you need to see it again."

The Lessons—the prologue to a multipart television opera called *Perfect Lives (Private Parts)*, created by Sanborn and composer Robert Ashley—is the most ambitious and complex effort at sustained visual humming to date. In it, Sanborn creates mythical figures who pose in sci-fi landscapes, shopping malls, and midwestern vistas, where time is suspended, speeded up, and rearranged.

Fitzgerald and Sanborn's *Static*, a two-minute tape that works as music, as mini-romance, and as an innovative approach to interior monologue, is another hummer. "Basically," says Sanborn, "it's boy meets girl. But the way it's phrased, the way the

sentences are cut up ('We meet... we met... if I... I was sure somehow... I know this sounds crazy'), and the way the simplicity of what he's saying works with the stuttering dynamic of the picture—it's about thinking and rethinking or guessing or hoping or dreams, and all that sort of bullshit. But, at the same time, it's 'boy meets girl.' There's three long shots when he finally starts to talk to this girl, and it's like—ooooooooohhhh! Thank goodness he did it. It's like asking a girl to dance."

Like many a hit pop tune, *Static* briefly and poignantly captures what Sanborn refers to as "the heroics of the banal," a continuing theme in their work. "No one ever shoots at me," he says, wryly. "I'm not in many car chases. I do the dishes a lot, the laundry has to be done—very, very simple things. In that ordering of everyday life, which the Zen masters say is all that we're supposed to do, you can find a great deal of cohesion. If you can get along with your girl friend or your boyfriend—that's a big achievement. Do you understand men and women? Can I understand? It sounds like a stupid set of subjects, but there's not much else."

Unlike many video artists working today, Fitzgerald and Sanborn want desperately to reach beyond the art world to the mass television audience. They were among the first to start calling themselves "television artists," to suggest that television can be intelligent, have artistic integrity, and also be popular. As children of the fifties and sixties, they grew up along with television. Sanborn is fond of saying, "Either you can quote 'Winky-Dink' [the first "interactive" television show for kids] or you can't." These two television babies have a lingering regard for a medium they believe has been sadly underestimated.

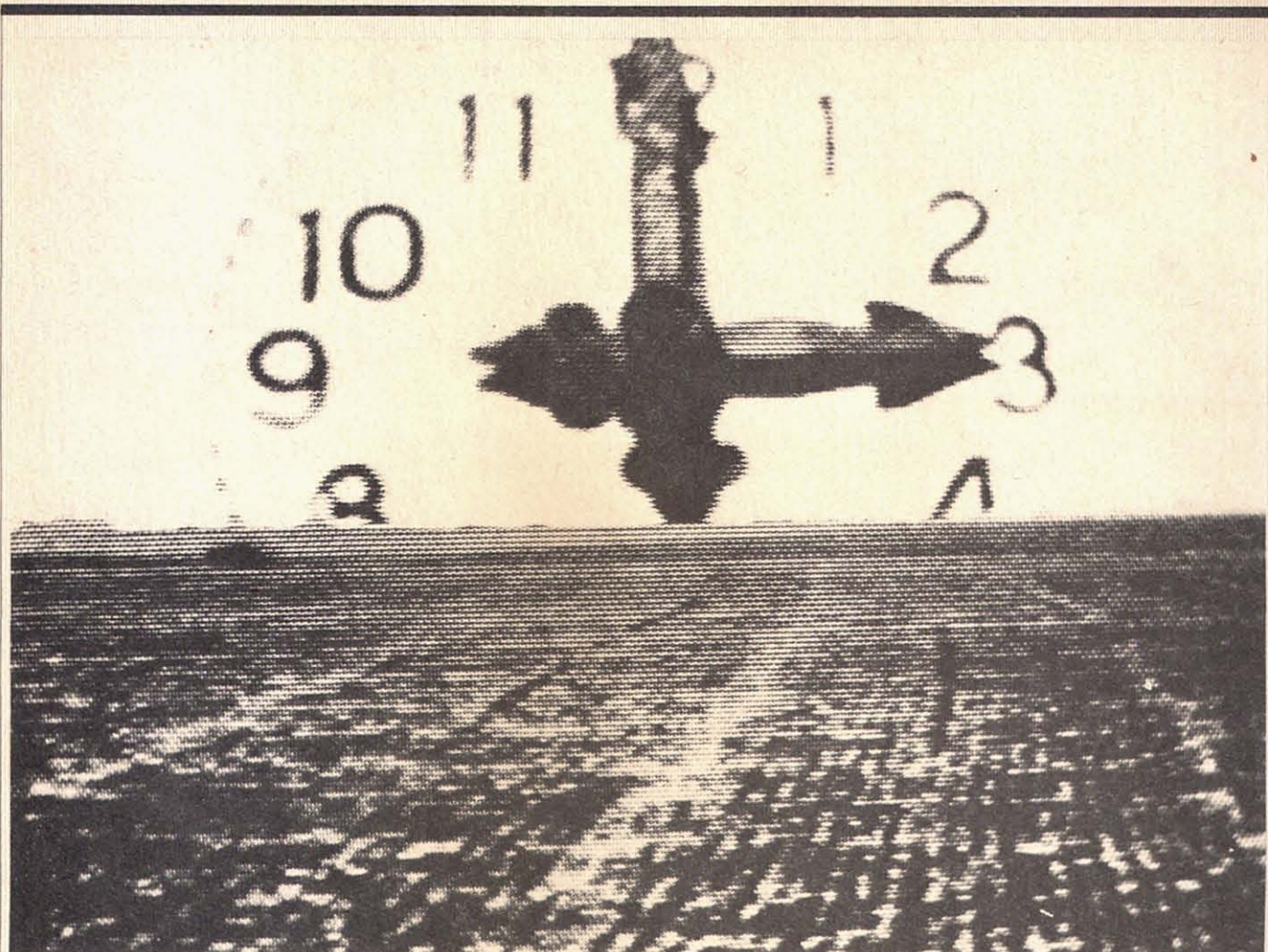
Their technique, in television terms, is closest to the replay of sports highlights, which focuses on three or four peak moments in a game rather than the whole event. Fitzgerald and Sanborn distill their work into highlights so that the viewer will want to watch it over and over again. "The crux of the repeat factor in television is also the crux of good art," Fitzgerald says. "A work of art in any form is successful when it draws you back in again. And when each time you return to it, it's a fresh experience."

This is one reason why the cable companies have been pursuing the pair. Like FM radio, many cable networks are programming in cycles, demanding visual material that will bear repeated showing and hold an audience. Fitzgerald and Sanborn have made this their stock-in-trade. According to Sanborn, "Daily rotation of a work allows an artist a lot more freedom to be seductive, because the subtle things that you can try (since it is going to be repeated) are much more engaging and artistic than something that hits you like a sledgehammer and gets out."

Understanding their collaboration is key

The man-woman question, a recurring theme in Fitzgerald and Sanborn's work, surfaces menacingly here in *Don't Ask*.





Over/Time, part of *Resolution of the Eye*, a tape by Fitzgerald and Sanborn.

to understanding the creative resources of the Fitzgerald-Sanborn opus. Generally, he does camera and she does sound; both are involved in editing, though one will defer to the other depending on who has been closest to a given project. Fitzgerald brings the "classical" sensibility and formal preoccupations to their work while Sanborn provides the humor and fire. Fitzgerald sees collaboration as a clue to why their art has been able to make the leap to a mass audience. Unlike artists working alone, they must constantly justify to each other decisions about their work. "When we are actually in the edit room, we've gone through a lot of the filtering process, which otherwise wouldn't happen until after the fact," she comments. "There's a lot of verbal and mental exchange that goes on when we're doing the work, and nonverbal exchange, too. Asking yourself questions alone or in silence doesn't help you to find the answers so quickly."

Of course, they don't do everything together. While he has gone off to collaborate with musicians, she has worked as a director. Fitzgerald is one of a select number of women members of the Directors Guild

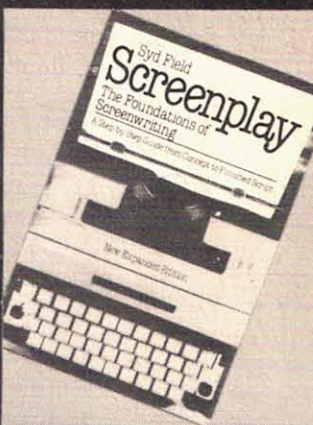
of America, and she has recently directed several programs for public television. And since 1976, they have worked—either separately or together—with other artists. Most recently they have been collaborating with choreographer Twyla Tharp on the seventy-four-minute history of her dance company, a tape that played at AFI's Washington, D.C., theater in April. Fitzgerald and Sanborn's kinetic, musical style is well matched with Tharp's brand of postmodern dance. All three look forward to a new video-dance collaboration, sort of an *Olympic Fragments* meets *Making TV Dance*.

"Part of our genius, if we have any in video," says Sanborn, "is understanding how discrete things can be added up to make something whole that never existed before, only through the medium." Working with performing artists who not only understand this process but desire it for their own work remains a constant source of creative energy and ideas for them. "You can make an experimental film by yourself, but you can't make a Hollywood movie by yourself," Sanborn says. "I don't want to be thought of as 'incompetent entertainment.' One of the ways to break that is to work with people. 'You can't play

baseball by yourself,' Bob Ashley says. And you can't make anything substantial in terms of television or movies by yourself."

With success comes more pressure to create, and the prolific pair are currently engaged in multiple ventures. For the Whitney's recent retrospective, Fitzgerald and Sanborn produced a tribute to Nam June Paik, a half-hour videotape homage to their friend and mentor. It has also aired on public television and was shown at AFI's recent video festival. For the TV Lab, they are producing and directing *Constant Change*, a four-part, hour-long dramatic work for television, in collaboration with musicians George Lewis, Ned Sublette, David Van Tieghem, and Peter Gordon. They are fired with the determination to come up with that rare cross between Hollywood and *Art Forum*. Working in popular art forms, where promising careers blaze up and then quickly die, they are also wary of success. "When you peak, it's only downhill—in art and entertainment," Sanborn notes. Their aim is to be a "slow-burning comet rather than a nova." ■

Deirdre Boyle is a free-lance writer and media critic currently writing a history of independent video.



THE STATE-OF-THE-ART GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL SCREENWRITING

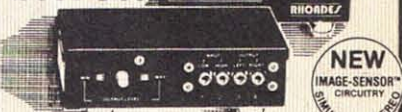
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Videography

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LETTERS

La Cage aux Folles (United Artists), 1979, 91 min., color. Fox (C).

NEWSREEL

Breaking Away (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1979, 100 min., color. Fox (C).

Popeye (Paramount), 1980, 114 min., color. Paramount (C).

DIALOGUE ON FILM: RENEE VALENTE

The Day the Earth Stood Still (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1951, 92 min., B/W. Fox (C).
Loving Couples (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1980, 97 min., B/W. Vestron (C).

FLASHBACK

The Philadelphia Story (MGM), 1940, 112 min. B/W. CBS (C); RCA (S).

GETTING A HOLD ON GARP

Blow Out (Filmways), 1981, 107 min., color. Warner (C); RCA (S).

Breaking Away (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1979, 100 min., color. Fox (C).

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1969, 110 min., color. Fox (C); RCA (S).

Doctor Zhivago (MGM), 1965, 197 min., color. CBS (C).

The Great Waldo Pepper (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1975, 108 min., color. MCA (C,L).

The Sting (Universal), 1973, 129 min., color. MCA (C,L).

CAN MOVIES KILL?

The Deer Hunter (Universal), 1978, 183 min., color. MCA (C).

I Spit on Your Grave (Jerry Gross), 1980, 98 min., color. Wizard (C).

DISNEY LOOKS FOR A HAPPY ENDING TO ITS GRIM FAIRY TALE

The Black Hole (Buena Vista), 1979, 97 min., color. Disney (C).

The Black Stallion (Buena Vista), 1979, 120 min., color. Fox (C); RCA (S).

The Devil and Max Devlin (Buena Vista), 1981, 95 min., color. Disney (C).

The Love Bug (Buena Vista), 1968, 110 min., color. Disney (C); RCA (S).

My Bodyguard (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1980, 96 min., color. Fox (C).

Ordinary People (Paramount), 1980, 125 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).

Pollyanna (Buena Vista), 1960, 134 min., color. Disney (C).

Time Bandits (Handmade Films), 1981, 116 min., color. Paramount (C).

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (Buena Vista), 1954, 127 min., color. Disney (C); RCA (S).

The Wizard of Oz (MGM), 1939, 101 min., color. CBS (C).

ROBERT M. YOUNG'S ORDINARY PEOPLE

One-Trick Pony (Warner), 1980, 98 min., color. Warner (C).

BOOKS

Mildred Pierce (Warner Bros.), 1945, 113 min., B/W. Fox (C).

The Public Enemy (Warner Bros.), 1931, 84 min., B/W. Fox (C).

Yankee Doodle Dandy (Warner Bros.), 1942, 126 min., B/W. Fox (C).

TRAILERS

Foul Play (Paramount), 1978, 118 min., color. Paramount (C); RCA (S).

The Great Santini (Warner Bros.), 1979, 118 min., color. Warner (C).

Stardust Memories (United Artists), 1980, 89 min., B/W. Fox (C).

Taps (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1981, 130 min., color. Fox (C).

Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines (Twentieth Century-Fox), 1965, 138 min., color. Fox (C).

Distributor Directory

CBS Home Video 1700 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10019, (212) 975-1700.

Walt Disney Home Video 500 South Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91521, (213) 840-1875.

MCA Distributing Corp. 70 Universal City Plaza, Universal City, CA 91608, (213) 508-4518.

Paramount Home Video 5451 Marathon Street, Hollywood, CA 90038, (213) 468-5000.

RCA SelectaVision 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10020, (212) 621-6000.

Twentieth Century-Fox Video 23434 Industrial Park Court, Farmington Hills, MI 48024, (313) 477-6066.

Vestron Video Club 911 Hope St., Largo Park, Stamford, CT 06907, (203) 358-0000.

Warner Home Video 3 East 54th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022, (212) 750-0750.

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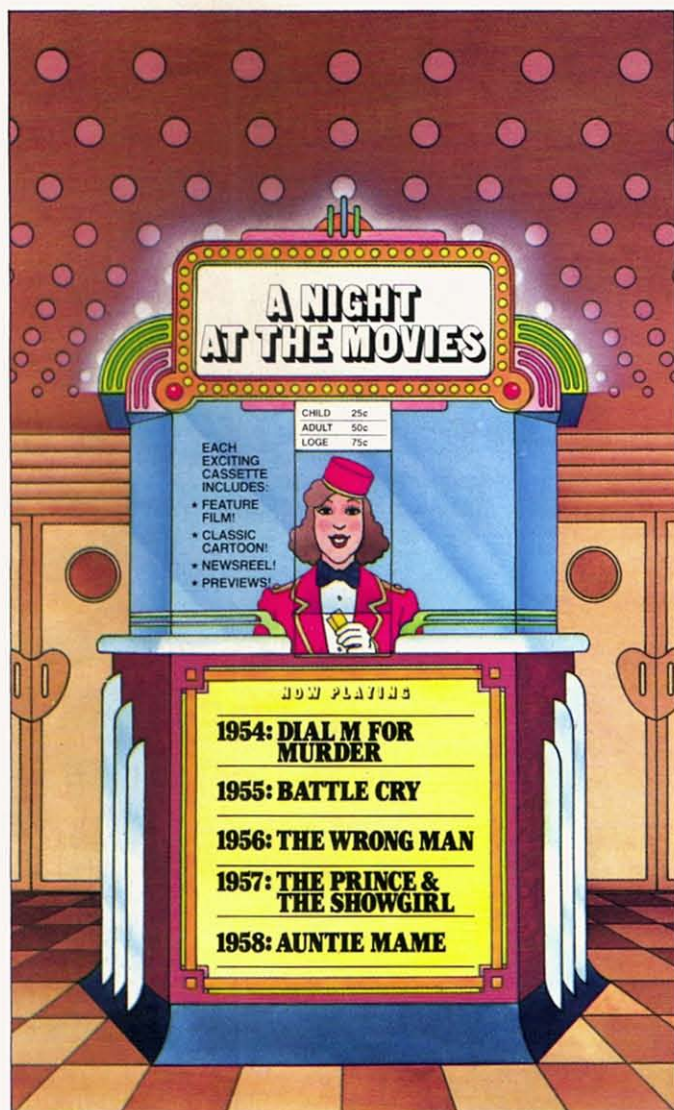
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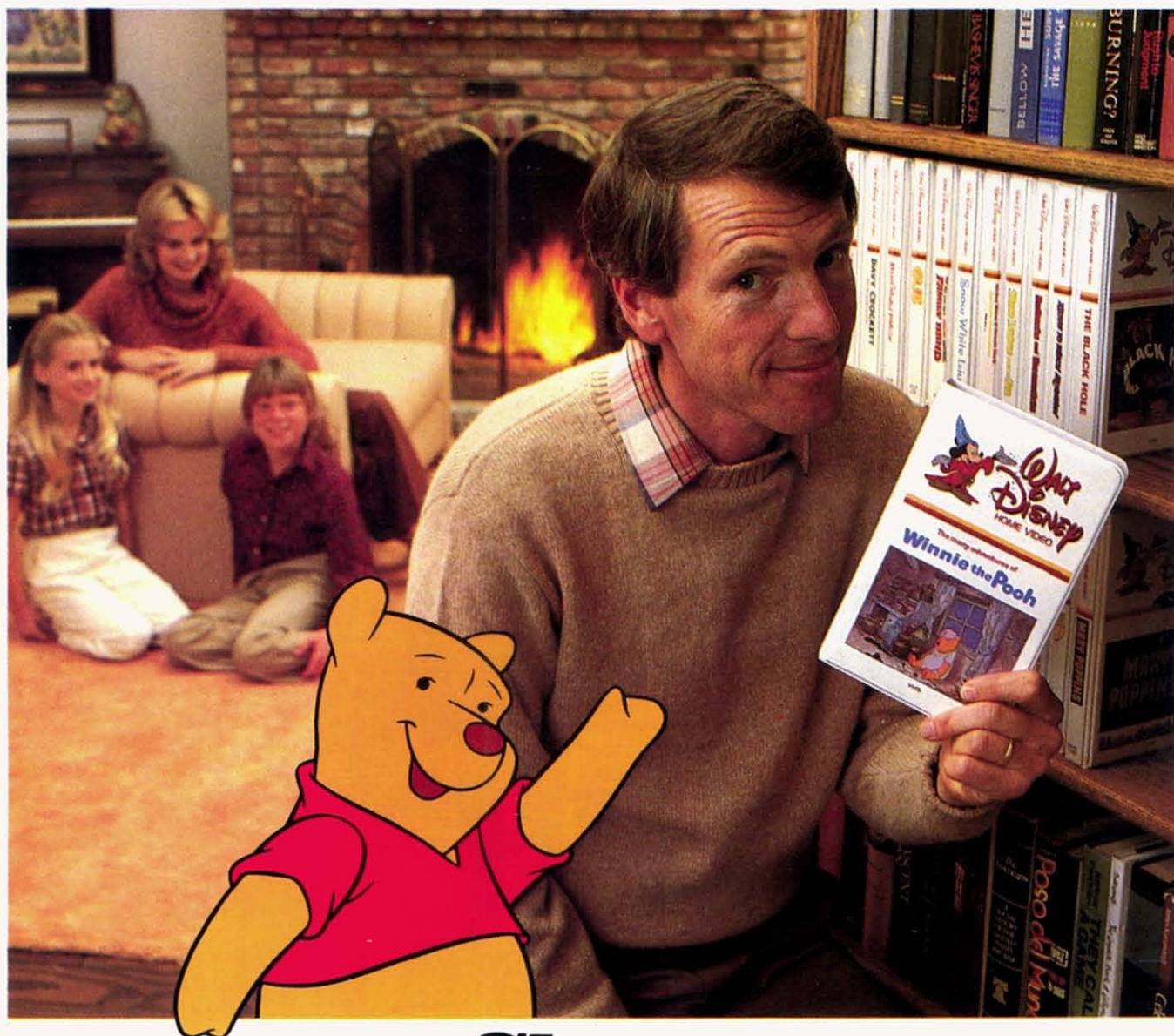
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Renée Valente

The producer talks about her work with the Producers Guild and recalls a memorable casting experience with a young Burt Reynolds.

Renée Valente is a producer who cares about more than where her next package is coming from. As the head of the Producers Guild of America, Valente is attempting to raise the consciousness of the film community (and the general public) about just what producers do and what the problems are.

Valente earned her own producing stripes over a long, hard haul. In the early fifties, she was a part-time secretary at David Susskind's Talent Associates when a chance suggestion to her boss about cutting production costs won her a promotion. She went on to casting and production jobs on a variety of television series and specials, as well as administrative posts with Screen Gems International (which became Columbia Pictures Television). In 1977 she formed her own production company, and two years later, she teamed up with Susskind in the production of the miniseries *Blind Ambition*. Valente's most recent credits include the theatrical feature *Loving Couples* and the television movie *Jacqueline Susann's Valley of the Dolls* "1981". In the Dialogue, she offers her views on how cable is changing the face of the film and television industry, and cites the problems she has encountered as a woman in a male-dominated profession.

Question: The Screen Actors, Directors, and Writers Guilds have made a lot of news in recent months, yet not many people outside Hollywood know there is a Producers Guild. What is its function?

Renée Valente: It is exactly what it says: It's the Producers Guild of America and



every producer who has enough credits is invited to join. The purpose of the guild is to get a basic minimum wage and benefits for producers. It's interesting that the producer, who normally creates a project and is with it long before anybody else joins and long after everyone else has left, is the only person who gets no residuals, no health, welfare, or pension benefits. We find that terribly unfair and we're hoping to change that.

I also believe that a guild should help advise its people of what's available out there and try very hard to get them positions. We will be publishing an availability list that will go out to all those people who hire producers and associate producers, somewhat like the availability roster the

An inquiry into the arts and crafts of filmmaking through interview seminars between Fellows and prominent filmmakers held under the auspices of The American Film Institute's Center for Advanced Film Studies.

Directors Guild sends out. And we are forming a committee whose first activity will be a luncheon, with an entertainment group performing a collection of skits titled "What Is a Producer?" Because if I am asked once more "What is a producer?" I will throw up. We will try to show anybody who's interested just who is a producer and who is not a producer. I'd like to do that with a sense of humor, to educate people as to what producers do.

Question: What constitutes a sufficient list of credits for a producer to belong to the guild?

Valente: We accept any individual who is employed as a supervisor of all creative and physical aspects of the making of a motion picture or television production.

If, after October 17, 1960, this person has acted as a producer of not less than one feature-length film, or thirteen short theatrical pictures, or six one-hour or thirteen half-hour television programs, or three two-hour television movies, or three "specials" not less than one hour in length, he or she is eligible to join. We have a formula which I think should be even a little more stringent, because today everybody thinks he is a producer. Everybody thinks he is a director. Everybody thinks he can star, write, produce, and direct. And I don't think there are very many Orson Welleses around. I think it's important that we do what we're best at instead of trying to do two or more things that we're half good at. That's one reason I'd like that formula to be more stringent, so if somebody's daughter gets to produce something because of who she knows and not what she knows, she will not necessarily be called a producer until she proves herself.

When I walk onto a set for the first time, the looks I get are marvelous. They're: "Oh, God, a broad . . . what is she doing here?"

Question: So, as it stands now, if you're friends with the right person on a film, you can carry an associate producer credit just for that reason?

Valente: Yes. There's no tightening on that situation yet. We hope to tighten it.

Question: How does someone become a producer *without* knowing the right person on a film?

Valente: I can speak from my own experience. I have had every job possible in this business. I started as a part-time secretary, typing scripts, working for the story department with David Susskind at a company called Talent Associates. I was rather young and it was not in fashion yet to be a rebel—but I thought if a network gives you a dollar to do a show, why then do you have to go back to them and pay them thirty-five cents for sets and fifty cents for facilities and ten cents for fringe benefits? That's like a company store. Why can't you go out and open bids to people who would like to do those sets, or would like you to use their facilities?

When I approached Susskind and his partner, Al Levy, with this idea, they looked at me and thought that I was nuts. I said, "Well, what harm is there in trying?" And they said, "Go ahead, but if it doesn't work . . ." And it did work. It was perhaps the first time that a production company was building sets, at a company called City Construction, taping shows at CBS, and airing them on NBC.

Having been innovative in a way, I moved from secretary to budget director. Then I became a production assistant and a go-fer, and then an associate producer, and then a head of production, and then a producer. That takes two and a half seconds to tell, but it took thirteen years to actually happen. My experiences gave me an insight into everything that is necessary to put a film on the air or in the theater. I can ask anything of anybody who works for me because, having been there, I know what the problems are.

As a producer, I am there before the first shot in the morning. I am the director's tool, I am the actor's godmother, I am the crew's backbone. I am there to give anything that anybody needs to make the production better, more creative, and not a runaway production. And I leave after the last shot of the day. That takes a lot of time; you cannot work on four projects at

the same time when you're doing that—and I don't work on four projects at one time. I work on one project at a time. So I may do less than a lot of other people, but I'm happier with my project when it is finished.

Question: What problems have you encountered as a woman working in a field still dominated by men?

Valente: When I walk onto a set for the first time, the looks I get are marvelous. They're: "Oh, God, a broad . . . I mean, what is she doing here?" You come to expect that. What makes it wonderful is that after about a week or ten days, you begin to see looks that say, "Gee, I think she knows what she's doing" and "Gee, I think she's nice" and "Yeah, I like working with her." And there's a wonderful, wonderful esprit de corps after that.

At the beginning, the production manager hates me; he doesn't know if he's got a producer who's going to care about the dollar and make his job more difficult. He doesn't know if he has a producer who respects his expertise. There are very definite lines drawn at the beginning, and constant cooperation and respect are necessary to keep it all together and have everybody working together.

Question: With regard to casting, you must have been helpful to many actors early in their careers, before they became stars. Can you recall any particularly memorable examples?

Valente: In the mid-sixties, I was producing a television pilot in New York called "Hawk," about a New York policeman who was part Indian. We were looking for an actor to play the role, and the network wanted David Carradine. An agent in New York called me and said, "I have an actor who has been in the business a long time, but hasn't played anything other than Indians and is upset and is leaving the business. He's going back down to Jupiter, Florida, and he's going to become a deputy sheriff with his father. But would you see him?" I said, "OK."

I walked this 225-pound man with a moon face who looked like Marlon Brando. He was acting very hostile. I said, "What are you so upset about?" He said a few hostile words and I wanted to throw a chair at him, but we decided that maybe we should talk for a few minutes. I told him that he was probably getting character

roles because he looked like one. And he probably had great cheekbones, but no one could see them for the extra weight. I suggested he diet and then do a film test.

He had no place to stay, and so with my husband's permission he stayed at our house. We put him on a three-week diet of Bloody Marys, steak, and tomatoes. He lost almost thirty pounds, and in the interim I was trying to get money from the studio for what we call a personality test. That's not a scene; that's just sitting an actor in front of the camera and asking him all sorts of inane questions. Finally, I got the money to go to a studio and test this man, whose name was Burt Reynolds. He had played the blacksmith on "Gunsmoke" and some other small roles.

Burt was standing in the studio, facing the camera, head bowed, and I figured as soon as we started to roll, his head would go up and he'd smile and start to answer questions. From behind the camera I started asking him those questions—he never raised his head. And I said, "Burt? We're doing a personality test, Burt." His head was down and all his hostility was still there. He was not about to give all those people in Hollywood a shot at rejecting him again. He had made that decision when we started to roll the camera.

Now, at this point my rump was in a sling because I'd opened my mouth to everybody in California. I was panicked until I saw a ladder in the studio; I knew that if I walked up the ladder, he would wonder what in the hell I was doing and probably try to see. So I started to climb the ladder. I told the cameraman to roll film if and when Burt picked up his head. I went up the ladder and Burt's head went like this [indicating a craning neck]. We had been playing a lot of movie games through the weeks, like, "Clark Gable—what movies was he in?" When I got to the top rung, I said, "For a million dollars, name me two William Lundigan movies." And he broke up. That was the personality test. And he got the show.

Question: Could you talk a little about casting your new film about Frank Sinatra? How are you going to approach that role?

Valente: It's going to be a big chore. There is no question that we will be using Sinatra's singing voice, but you need somebody who can make you believe that he's singing. We're following Frank Sinatra

from the time he's born to when he wins the Academy Award for *From Here to Eternity*. Robert De Niro would like to play the adult Sinatra. I have received up to this point about three thousand letters, tapes, and videocassettes. Everybody thinks that he can play Sinatra. Would you believe that I get pictures from six-foot-two, red-headed, freckle-faced men who say, "Look at my picture. Don't I look like Sinatra?"

Question: Most of your projects have been financed through the major studios or the networks. What's your feeling about independent financing?

Valente: I'm really afraid of independent money. I think the pitfall with independent money is that they pull out five minutes before midnight. And you're never quite sure. Shirley MacLaine was going to do a movie in Canada, "The Amazing Mrs. Chadwick." She flew up there, was going to start shooting Monday, and Friday the money wasn't there.

Question: Could you describe what your tactics are as an independent producer in approaching a studio or network with a project?

Valente: I would approach them from the point of view that I have something they want. I don't discuss the project for an hour; I like to take about ten minutes at the most. I like to take another fifteen minutes in discussing who the writer, director, and star should be. And then I like to leave the project with them to read. I feel that there's a tremendous amount of time wasted in meetings in this industry. First you meet to talk about it; then they read it; then you meet afterwards to talk about it again. My sell is a very soft one. I know that my reputation is good, so if I come in with anything halfway decent, I get a great shot.

Question: What's your philosophy about working with several different writers on a film?

Valente: I hope to go through only one writer on a project. Sometimes you have to go through another because the money people decide that that writer can't do the script. I may decide that the first can't do it, but I try to get the best writer up front so that I don't go through those disappointments. It's happened to me maybe three times, but the networks and the studios are very easy to say, "Oh, let's get another writer." That happens very often.

Question: Are you allowed to hire any writer you want to develop a project, even if he doesn't have much of a track record?

Valente: Absolutely not. It is tough to get a new writer or a new director approved for television. I mean, it is almost impossible.

It's easier in features.

Question: Does a writer have a better chance by submitting a finished script rather than a treatment or outline?

Valente: I think so. I remember when I was at Columbia and became vice-president in charge of movies and miniseries. A wonderful script was given to me by a friend. I said, "God, I could sell this as a three-hour television show." I immediately called my friend and said, "Who is this writer?" He said, "Renée, you promise that you're not going to lose your enthusiasm if I tell you?" I said, "No." He said, "He's in the mail room at NBC. And his name is Dennis

Nemec." We did the show, and he's been writing ever since. A manuscript is important: Even if they don't want to do that script, it shows them what you can do.

Question: How do you deal with pressures from studios or networks to stay on schedule or not go over budget?

Valente: I'll give you an example. I did a miniseries, and the head of production, the moneyman, kept saying, "She's shooting too much film. She should cut the script. It's going to be too long." And the head of the company kept saying to me, "You're too long," and kept repeating all of that. And I kept saying, "It's too early to cut. I

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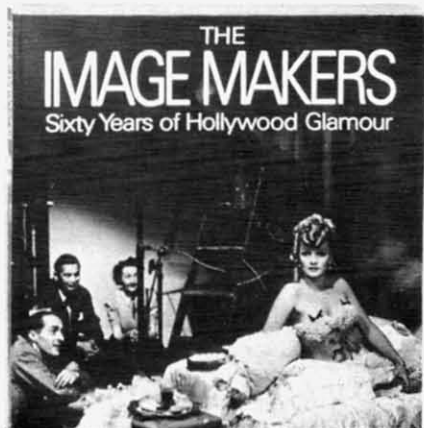
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have my cuts; I'll do them later." I had a plan which I was certainly not going to tell them. My plan was that by introducing music and production numbers I could extend my show an hour. If I could do all I wanted to do within the time frame of that four hours, but still do the five hours, all it would cost the studio was film. But if I could sell that extra hour, it would be a boon to them.

And so I said, "It's OK. I'll cut simultaneously a four-hour and a five-hour. Don't worry about it." Well, I did sell the fifth hour, and it was a boon to the studio, and the network, and I became a hero instead of a stubborn producer.

Question: What interested you in remaking two successful films like *Jacqueline Susann's Valley of the Dolls* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*?

Valente: I did *Valley of the Dolls* because my agent said, "Renée, it's about time you did something commercial. Quality is one thing, but you've got to do something commercial every once in a while." He was right. I said I would do it if I could do it my way—a *Valley of the Dolls* "1981" showing what happens today in Hollywood. I'm very proud of the film. I thought it was one hell of a production. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* scared me because I believed it—the reality of the characters and situation—and I feel we have a lot at stake now. The message of the film is clear.

Question: You mentioned your agent. Don't most producers do without agents?

Valente: Yes. I don't know that producers really need agents. But my agent is a great help to me, especially in packaging. And certainly as a sounding board.

Question: As a producer, you have to be inventive to overcome unanticipated problems. Could you give an example of where you've had to improvise to get around an obstacle?

Valente: One that comes to mind is *Blind Ambition*, which was an eight-hour miniseries. We had tremendous legal problems in getting all the clearances. Jimmy Carter was in the White House then, and his administration didn't want us to shoot anywhere near the White House; they didn't want to have anything to do with it. But we needed the Executive Office Building. It was key for a scene.

What we finally did was to rent cars and park them parallel across the street from the building so no one else could park there. As people moved their cars, going to lunch or whatever, we put our actors there very quickly and shot it. When we needed John Dean to go into the White House, we couldn't get into the White House, so we

had Marty Sheen get in his car and drive up to the gate—we shot it while he was driving up. He stopped and the guard said to him, "Yes?" Of course, the guard didn't let him go, but we had our shot coming and going.

Question: There are people who would argue that film is the director's medium and television is the producer's medium. Do you have any comments on that?

Valente: I think when you do a motion picture, the producer's job is not less, but the director's job is more. Most directors just do television as a work necessity and all the while hope for that feature, where they will have the time to create.

Question: What do you think is the main reason for the escalating costs of today's movies?

Valente: A greedy society. People not worrying about tomorrow, only being concerned with what they're going to make today. I think the three labor strikes our industry suffered are why we are having problems today. They proved to the networks that they do not have to stockpile, that people will watch reruns and they will get just about the same numbers. The strikes proved to the feature division that they could reissue hit pictures and make a lot of money spending much less. And cable is still a few years in coming. So I think the industry hurt itself: less production and more unemployment.

Question: What's your view on the effects of cable on the industry?

Valente: Most of the people who ruined our business are now heading up cable. Most of the people whose taste sent our industry down are now over there. And I believe, unfortunately, that that will hurt cable for a while. Right now they are unsure of the product they want and how to program it. In the future, there will not be just three networks or six studios—there will be many buyers. But I think that at that time filmmakers will be asked to do product for far less money. ■

Selected Films of Renée Valente

The Father Knows Best Reunion—NBC-TV—1977—executive producer.

Contract on Cherry Street—NBC-TV—1977—executive producer.

Blind Ambition—CBS-TV—1979—producer with George Schaefer.

Swan Song—ABC-TV—1980—producer with David Soul.

Loving Couples—Twentieth Century-Fox—1980—producer.

Jacqueline Susann's Valley of the Dolls "1981"—CBS-TV—1981—producer.

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Don Stewart in Exile

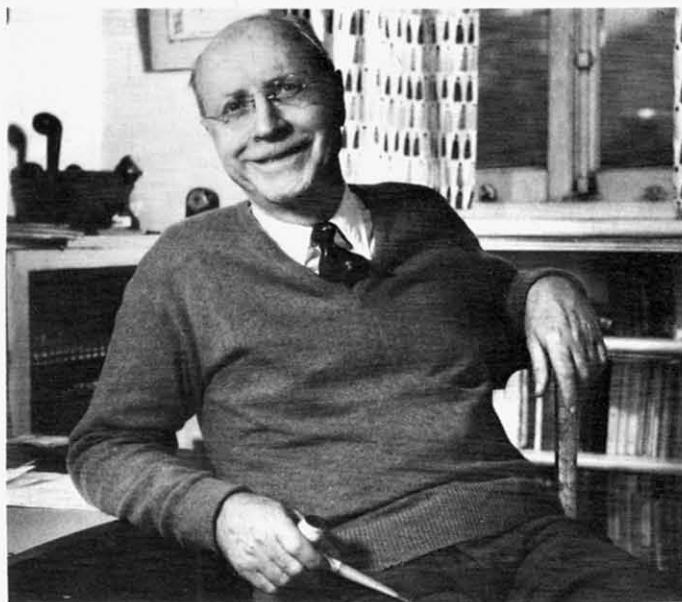
Max Wilk

After thirty years in Hollywood, the celebrated screenwriter fled the blacklist, and found that living in London was the best revenge.

When Philip Barry's *The Philadelphia Story* was revived a couple of seasons ago at the Vivian Beaumont Theater of Lincoln Center, the critics were polite and friendly, but they could not help wistfully comparing it to the 1940 film version. Ironical, indeed. For years, Hollywood was accused of reducing solid-gold dramatic hits from New York and London to double-feature dross. Not so, evidently, with *The Philadelphia Story*. The MGM production starred Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, and Jimmy Stewart, and the director was George Cukor—one tough act to follow. But if so many other Broadway hits, even those guided by Cukor, floundered on film, how is it that Barry's comedy survived the transfer not only unscathed, but enhanced?

Perhaps the answer is the screenwriter who turned a brilliant play into a sparkling film—the late Donald Ogden Stewart. But if you had asked Stewart himself how he came to win the Academy Award for Best Screenplay in 1940, he would say, "I didn't really do much with Phil's script. It was so good—I stood back and got out of the way of his characters." Possible, but not probable. Any writer Louis B. Mayer paid \$5,250 a week had to be worth it, and that was Stewart's salary until he left Hollywood in 1951 at the age of fifty-seven—under something of a cloud—and took up permanent residence in London. Stewart gave Mayer full value during his two decades at MGM—all the way back to the early thirties, when he was Irving Thalberg's favorite crafter of comedy.

Stewart and his wife, Ella, settled in a



Donald Ogden Stewart, in his London home, 1955.

London far less chic than now. They bought a remarkable pink house with a terraced garden, high on a steeply winding Hampstead street known as Froggnal. There, at 103, within the walls that had once belonged to Prime Minister James Ramsay MacDonald, the Stewarts kept open house, dispensing tea and sympathy, wine, wit, and hospitality to visitors, friends, and fellow expatriates.

Don—nobody ever called him anything more formal—was a jovial, lanky gentleman, blessed with modesty and a gentle wit. "Success was always easy for me," he once said to me, adding, "maybe a bit too easy, toots." He had flourished first as a practicing humorist during the twenties in Manhattan, where his cronies included F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert Benchley, Dorothy Parker, Edmund Wilson, and Herman Mankiewicz. When his good pal Ernest Hemingway wrote *The Sun Also Rises*, a thinly disguised Don was immortalized as

one of the characters.

He answered the siren call of Hollywood very early, even before talkies. "Those were the days when you could have a lot of fun out there," he recalled during a series of visits I made to 103 Froggnal at the beginning of the seventies. "It was in 1926, and here I was, a Yale man—so they hired me to do a screenplay called *Brown of Harvard*." There were journeys back and forth between Hollywood and New York. But then came the talking picture, and by 1931 Don had moved out to stay.

Decades later, Don, settled in London, was to find himself historic. No matter how much he had accomplished on his own, he had become a legend because of his friends. The phone rang

steadily with requests for interviews. "All anybody wants to know is what really happened with Hem and me when we went to Pamplona," Don would complain, "or how come old Scott had such a bad time writing scripts at Metro." He and Ella attracted a constant parade of friends as well. Charlie and Oona Chaplin (with or without children), Katharine Hepburn, Edward Albee, S.J. Perelman (with whom Don had labored in the Mayer vineyards), painters, politicians, Third World diplomats, old pals from Don's early activist years in Hollywood—all filled the house with argument, gossip, and laughter.

Guests were surrounded by a junglelike array of plants and Ella's amazingly eclectic collection of art: Klee drawings, Grosz watercolors, Yugoslavian folk art, African Bakota masks, Japanese netsuke, and Ming china. In drafty back rooms were Marini sculptures and rare Ernst pieces. Ella's treasures spilled out in every direction. In

Wolf Suschitzky

the upstairs bathroom, hanging above the tub, was a set of superb, glowing Edward Weston nude studies; when one emerged, one might discover on the far wall, in the dim hallway light, a Ben Shahn sketch, or even an early Picasso drawing of circus acrobats.

Then there were those industrious browsers in cinema history who came to question Don about his own screenwriting career. "It wasn't much," he would complain. "Surely you don't want to rehash all that stuff, do you?" Indeed they did. Despite his own modest self-appraisal, Don's name was on such landmark films as *Dinner at Eight*, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and *Holiday*, adapted with Sidney Buchman from Philip Barry's play.

Holiday was the first film Don did for Katharine Hepburn. Besides *The Philadelphia Story*, he went on to do *Without Love* and *The Keeper of the Flame*. In the last, Hepburn starred as the widow of an American neo-Fascist would-be dictator. "Now that is the picture I'm proudest of having had anything to do with," he said. "It expressed the most about fascism which was possible at the time—at Metro, in 1942. I.A.R. Wyllie had written this novel about the possibility of fascism taking over America, and I didn't change her story at all. When we were making it, we had to keep it all very quiet. After all, L.B. Mayer, our boss, was not exactly a liberal type. . . . L.B. went to see the picture in the Music Hall and got so sore at the political attitudes in the script, he got up and stamped right out!"

Don hadn't always been a liberal. But when the Depression settled in, Don's political consciousness flared into life. "I think the turning point for me came when things got really tough, in '32, and L.B. Mayer, who was a big pal of Herbert Hoover's, called us, one by one, into his office. There he was, sitting behind that huge desk, almost on a throne, and he began to cry. Old L.B. was a marvelous weeper. He said, 'Oh, this Depression, it's just terrible, isn't it?' I said, 'I guess it is, Mr. Mayer.' Then he said, 'Don, I'm going to have to ask you a terrific favor personally. To help us stay in business, I want you to agree to take a cut in salary.' And so help me, he began to cry again! I said, 'Well, L.B., for heaven's sake, I'm only too glad to be of help.' What else could I say? Later on, we found out everybody in the whole place had taken a cut—except L.B.!

"But after that, some of us out in the studios began to feel a certain amount of

awareness. In 1935 they organized the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, and I immediately joined. They were going to have a big meeting to do a reading of Irwin Shaw's new play *Bury the Dead*. . . . The day of that affair, Sam Marx, the Metro story editor, came into my office, shut the door, and said, 'Look, Don, Irving won't like it if you take part in this meeting.' I guess that was when I took a stand. Good Lord, I knew about Irving Thalberg—he'd been a socialist himself as a boy, made street-corner speeches in New York—and here he was, trying to keep me from exercising the right of free speech, just because he had me under contract."

If the league and other organizations were Communist "fronts" and he and others involved were somehow duped, Don was unashamed. "Oh, sure, maybe they were," he said. "But I don't have any excuses to make for what we were doing then. Far from it. If you'd been to any of our rallies and meetings, and heard the speeches—my Lord, I even got Ernest Hemingway to come address the League of American Writers on Spain, and Hem certainly was no dupe—you'd have recognized that what was being said was really good old honest American antifascism. We were trying to prepare America for an understanding of what was going on in Hitler's Germany, and in Italy. . . . That's what we were worried about, toots, and we were right to worry, wouldn't you say?"

Politics make strange bedfellows. The creation of hit moving pictures makes even stranger ones. Producer-director Leo McCarey was one of Hollywood's most fervent anti-Communists, but Don and Delmer Daves wrote the screenplay for McCarey's classic *Love Affair*. "Leo was great fun—as a person," Don recalled. "Sure, he was mixed up in that outfit dedicated to the preservation of American ideals—whatever that meant—along with John Wayne, Adolph Menjou, Ward Bond, and a whole bunch of others. Those guys really despised everything we were doing, but when he wanted a good script, Leo could forget politics. Our relationship was strictly business. We talked story, never Spain."

And as for Stewart's other employers? "Well, Jack Warner and his brother Harry went along with the blacklisting, but when they needed a script for *Life With Father*, it didn't seem to bother them much when they hired me in 1947. And the year after that, L.B. Mayer assigned me to Sinclair Lewis's book *Cass Timberlane* for Spencer Tracy and Lana Turner."

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"Never tackle a screenplay at the beginning. Let the producer and his writers do a couple of drafts and mess it up."

descend? "It was right after *Edward My Son* that I got knocked off," Don recounted. "That was in 1949, and they were beginning to close in on me. Ma and I came over here to London so I could see the play, and then I wrote the screenplay for Spence, with George Cukor directing. There were some people who spread the story around that Metro had sent me over here to get me out of the country, so I couldn't be served with a subpoena by the HUAC guys. But I did go back to Hollywood and I never did get subpoenaed." He shrugged. "Maybe they were looking for some other Don Stewart, but who knows? I'd written a play called *The Kidders*, and an English producer wanted to put it on here, so we came back to London—and we've been here ever since.

"By that time, Metro had decided I was unemployable. But I had one of those wonderful contracts, and since I hadn't done anything morally reprehensible, at least in public"—Don beamed—"my lawyer negotiated a settlement. . . . So in a way, I was ahead of the game."

While other talented writers had floundered in Hollywood, Don had kept at it successfully. Did he evolve some *modus vivendi*? "I did come by some rules," Don said, "for whatever they're worth. First, you had to try and find out who the star of the picture you were writing was going to be. That's primary. It's very disconcerting to have written something for Joan Crawford, and then find out it's actually going to be Lana Turner. Secondly, *never* tackle a screenplay at the beginning. Let the producer and his writers do a couple of drafts and mess it up. Then, after they've made their mistakes and they're faced with a shooting date, you can come in and rewrite it, and be a big hero. And finally"—softly, unsmiling—"you had to learn not to let them break your heart."

Don learned how to work in Hollywood—and how to play. "Oh, yes, toots," he admitted, "they were *great* parties. Even up at William Randolph Hearst's castle. I was a pal of Marion Davies—even acted in a picture with her once, *Not So Dumb*—and so I'd be invited up for weekends. He'd brought in all those treasures from everywhere in Europe. I remember one night at dinner, we all sat there at a long table, nobody saying much, while W.R. held forth. I couldn't help it. I wished

somebody could laugh. So I thought I'd try to make them laugh. I was a little high by then, so I got up and began to improvise a speech about all of Hearst's various art treasures. I took them one by one, and I announced to W.R. that he'd been skinned by the European dealers—that they were all *fakes*.

"I kept on saying what a shame that this portrait wasn't really what he'd thought it was, that the Renaissance furniture was really from Grand Rapids—just carrying on like that. Nobody said a damned word. The whole hall was as silent as a graveyard, and I stood there and I figured I was dead forever. Then, suddenly, W.R. burst out laughing—and so did everybody else. I'll tell you one thing, I was never so happy to hear anybody laugh in my whole life!"

In 1972, a year or so after he told me that story, a banquet was announced, to which alumni of Yale, Harvard, and Princeton residing in London were cordially invited. The honored speaker of the evening would be Kingman Brewster, the president of Yale. In the course of conversation with Don—we spoke over the phone frequently—I mentioned the impending affair. As a member of the Yale class of 1916, he would certainly wish to attend.

"Oh, Lord," said Don. "You're kidding, toots. I haven't been to anything in or around Yale for years. I'd be a stranger at that feast for sure."

"I can't imagine why," I said.

"Nobody around Yale has approved of my politics since 1934, that's why," said Don. "I was for *Roosevelt*, remember?" But the following day, my phone rang early. "You know, I've been thinking," Don said. "It would be kind of nice to go and hear what Brewster has to say."

The night of the banquet I picked Don up at 103 Frogmal. He emerged wearing a sedate brown suit, a kind fashionable in the thirties. On his head was a dapper snap-brim fedora, also from another period, and he had on a double-breasted polo coat I had never seen him wear before. "Haven't been dressed up like this since I can remember," he said, grinning. "Do I look dapper enough? Don't want to let old Eli down, do we?"

Cocktails were served in an anteroom of the Dorchester ballroom. When Kingman Brewster arrived, I brought the two men

together. "I believe you'd wish to meet Mr. Donald Ogden Stewart, Class of 1916," I said to Brewster, my classmate of 1941.

"A great honor," Brewster said, and reached for Don's hand. "I've heard a great deal about you, sir."

"And you still want to shake my hand?" asked Don, impishly.

"Absolutely," said Brewster, and the two were soon deep in conversation, surrounded by an admiring group of fellow alumni.

As we went into dinner, Don turned to me. "He knew all about me," he said, amazed. "I was sure nobody remembered me any more."

"Except all those people writing Ph.D. theses," I reminded him.

The banquet took place in a vast room. Unfortunately, because of the lateness of our reservations, Don and I were not seated at the same table. He was some distance away, and I kept glancing over to make sure he was enjoying himself. I saw a wine cooler beside Don, with a bottle protruding; as the steward poured, I could see it was champagne, which Don proceeded to sip with obvious pleasure.

I made my way over when the silverside of beef was brought to him. The food sat in front of Don, uneaten. Obviously he was well along on a liquid diet. "Aren't you hungry?" I asked.

"I'm perfectly splendid," he said, happily. "Won't you have some of my private stock?"

I remembered the stories I'd heard of Don's youth, his days with the hard-drinking Long Island golden set. But those were carefree days long ago. Surely by now, in his sober seventies, Don would not be capable of such amiable mischief, not here, with this room full of sober, mercantile types. He sat quietly through the brief business meeting, and listened attentively when Brewster delivered his assessment of the obligations of Yale in these parlous times. When the applause ended, Brewster asked if there were any questions.

Don raised his hand and promptly, if a bit unsteadily, rose. "May I ask one?" he said.

"Mr. Stewart?" said Brewster. "Why certainly, sir."

"In my early youth, sir," said Don, grasping his chair to ensure his upright position, "which I may . . . immediately

Continued on page 65

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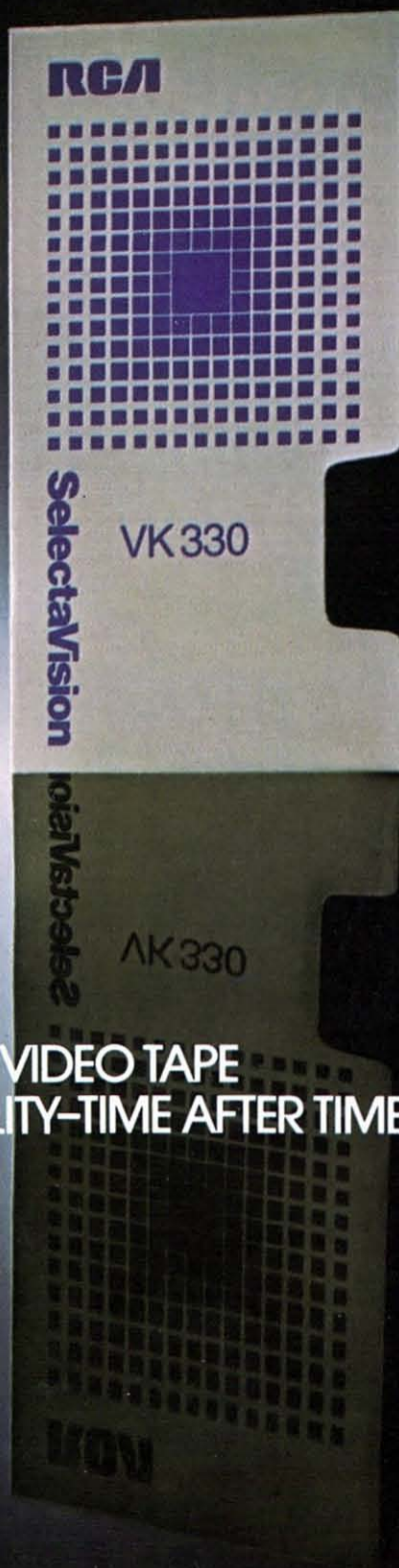
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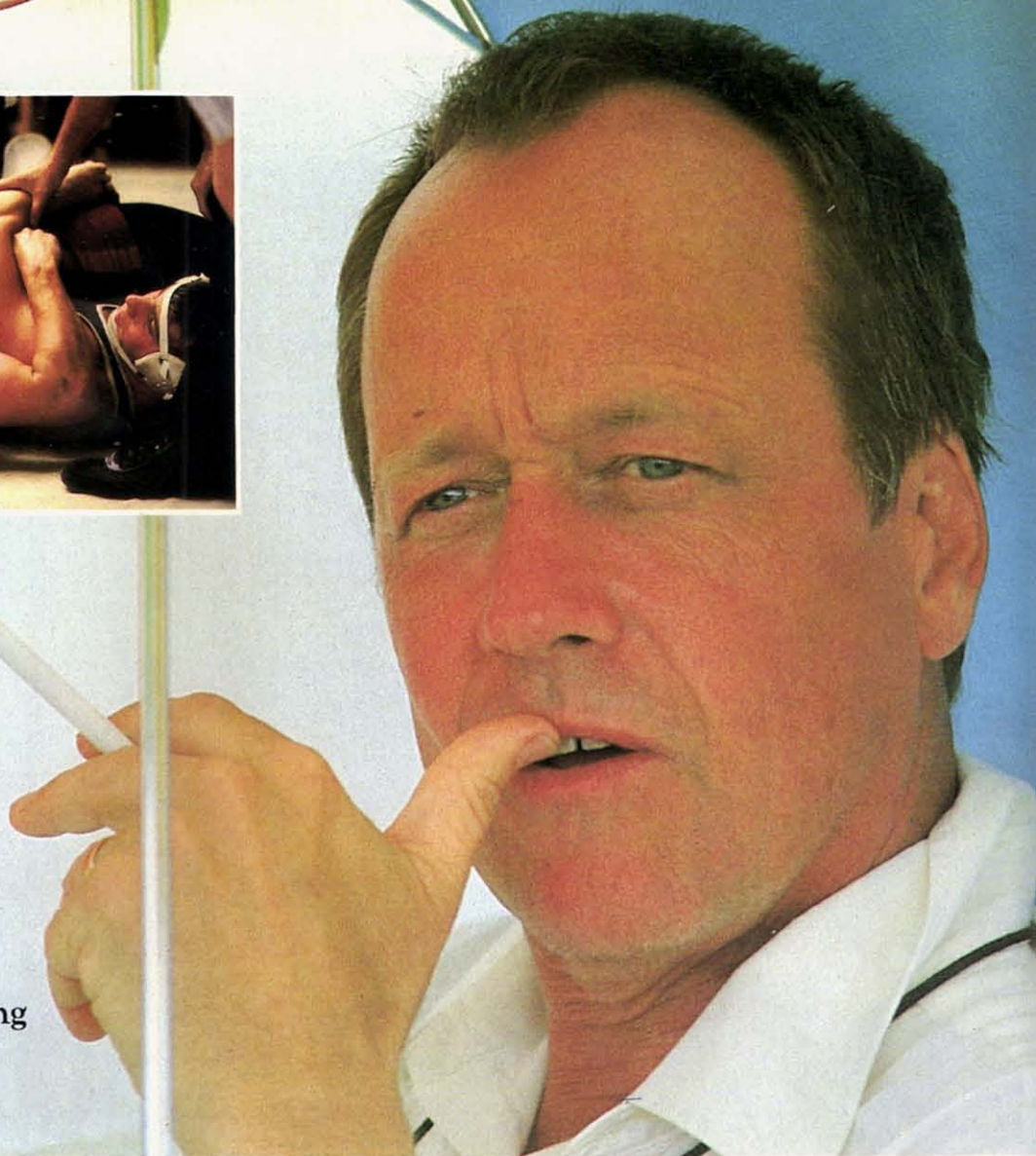
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GETTING A HOLD ON GARP

George Roy Hill wrestles with the problems of turning John Irving's sprawling best-seller into a film.

Andrew Horton



Robin Williams, in a soaked gray sweat suit, surveys a heavy-weight teenage wrestler who looks like the Incredible Hulk's kid brother. They warily circle each other. In a flash, Williams floors the young wrestler, who without apparent effort suddenly reverses Williams and begins working for a pin. Williams's face turns fire-engine red, but his struggle to free himself is futile. He is pinned. The contest is over.

"Cut!" calls out director George Roy Hill, and the teenager rolls off Williams. As the hero in the screen adaptation of John Irving's best-selling novel *The World According to Garp*, Williams has a full day's work cut out for him at the Astoria studios in New York. He's been shooting wrestling scenes—set in the Steering School gym—since six in the morning with high school bruisers twice his weight and strength. Lunch is more than an hour away, and he must go on until six in the evening.

It is June 5, 1981, and shooting on *Garp*

is roughly at the halfway mark, though a week behind schedule. "Somebody get me a prune daiquiri," says Williams as he pulls himself off the mat and slips into Mork humor. But before he can relax, John Irving, a wrestler as well as a writer, comes over and offers him advice for the next take. Soon the director's assistants call for silence. Irving, who will later play a bit part as a referee, retreats to the bleachers. Williams once again starts circling his tireless opponent.

Robin Williams as Garp? It is February 3, 1981. The film is to begin shooting in April, and Williams is in a Manhattan screening room as screen tests to cast Roberta—formerly Robert Muldoon, tight end for the Philadelphia Eagles—are about to be run. When it was announced that Williams had been cast in the lead, some fans of the novel were puzzled. Could Mork from Ork play Garp, the down-to-

earth American family man? "Mork & Mindy" and *Popeye* seemed specially created for Williams's zany talent for mimicry and satire, but did he have the emotional range to encompass T. S. Garp's extraordinary life?

"He has a certain *sweetness* about him," says casting director Marion Dougherty, who has had an impressive career of introducing actors to the screen (among them Dustin Hoffman and Warren Beatty). "I was attracted to his combination of toughness and gentleness," remarks Hill, who is not one to shy away from taking risks. A director with a reputation as a successful maverick, he often takes long shots in his casting. How many people had heard of Robert Redford before Hill went against the studio heads and insisted that he play opposite Paul Newman in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*?

Physically, Williams is right for the part. That's made clear when he and Irving meet in the screening room. Both men are short,



J.P. Laffont/Sygma

Transformations: For George Roy Hill, the challenges of filming The World According to Garp included: transforming actor John Lithgow, above, into the transsexual Roberta and turning comic Robin Williams, inset, into a wrestler.

stocky (Williams has built up his chest to more closely resemble the wrestling physique Garp possesses), and ruggedly handsome. They might be long lost brothers.

Lights out. The projector rolls four screen tests. How do you cast the role of a transsexual who's over six feet tall, looks like a former pro football player, and yet is feminine enough that, as Hill says, "I could take her out to dinner and no one would know the difference"? Hill and Dougherty considered using a woman for the part and even checked out some transvestites. But they decided that a male actor could best convey the rich variety of emotions that makes up Roberta, perhaps the one level-headed, stable person in *Garp*.

The finalists, dressed and made up as Roberta, were asked to do three things: receive a hike from center and throw a forward pass, answer questions in a spontaneous interview with Hill about their "operation," and do the scene in which Roberta tells Garp about the hate mail she receives ("This one hopes I'll get gangbanged by the Oakland Raiders"), closing with: "There are a lot of sick people out there."

Hill was on the fence about several of the candidates, thus the screening for producer Robert Crawford, executive producer Pat Kelley, Irving (in town to deliver the manuscript of *The Hotel New Hampshire*), and

Williams. The tests are run. Each Roberta has something to offer, but when the lights come back on, there is unanimous agreement: John Lithgow is the woman they want. Lithgow is a New York actor with many stage credits, including the lead in the Broadway play *Division Street* by Steve Tesich. He has also been in Robert M. Young's *Rich Kids* and, more recently, played the killer in Brian De Palma's *Blow Out*. "John has the right degree of warmth," says Hill, relieved that the last major character has been cast.

Steve Tesich, who adapted Irving's novel for the screen, is laughing. "I have received letters from three film professors so far who say they have used *The World According to Garp* as an example of a novel that could never be turned into a movie!" The professors were not alone. When Warner Bros. in 1979 offered the novel to George Roy Hill, he started to read it, put it down after a hundred pages, and said no. Then he went on reading.

As a novel, *Garp* has attracted more than four million readers. It was not only the best-seller of 1978 but a cultural event as well—perhaps as important for its time as J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* was for the fifties and as Kurt Vonnegut's work, especially *Slaughterhouse Five*, became

for the sixties. A sprawling tale of more than six hundred pages, *Garp* is held together by the tragicomic misadventures of its hero, whose entire life is chronicled, from his ludicrous conception in 1943 (his mother, Jenny, "rapes" a quadruple amputee in an army hospital and successfully impregnates herself) to his absurd assassination in the late seventies.

When Hill finally finished the book, he still harbored serious doubts about its cinematic potential, but he was ready to turn it into a film—with the right screenplay. One of the first screenwriters approached to do the adaptation was William Goldman. He had worked with Hill on *Butch Cassidy* and on *The Great Waldo Pepper*, but backed off the assignment because he couldn't figure out how to make the story visual enough for the screen. John Irving was also asked; without hesitation, he declined. Irving is the first to admit he doesn't think visually, and adds, "I spent four years writing the book. The last thing I wanted to do was to have to go back over it and reduce it to a screenplay."

That's when Tesich, who won an Academy Award for writing *Breaking Away*, was called in. Hill liked Tesich's sensitivity and ear for dialogue. "I had great enthusiasm for the early version of *Breaking Away*," Hill says, "and I tried to produce and direct it, but we never got it off the ground." Tesich disappeared to East Hampton in the fall of 1979 and returned with the first draft of a screenplay that surprised and delighted Hill. *Garp* was under way.

"Normally, I wouldn't do an adaptation," says Tesich. "But in the end, I really felt I was writing my autobiography. Like Garp, I was a wrestler who wanted to become a writer. And like Garp, I have a mother who is similar to Jenny in many ways." How did he transform the novel into a screenplay? It was simple, he says. He held on to the central concerns of the book and concentrated on those scenes that rang true to his experience. He sees Irving's book as a celebration of the simple joys and pleasures of life set against the chaos, violence, greed, and lust that constantly threaten them. "I've always wanted to write something that encompassed a man's entire life from the cradle to the grave," Tesich comments.

The script remains faithful to the spirit of Irving's bittersweet epic, but Tesich and Hill have made some substantial changes. One is the substitution of New York City for Vienna. In the novel young Garp moves to Vienna with his mother and there begins to develop into a writer. Tesich felt that

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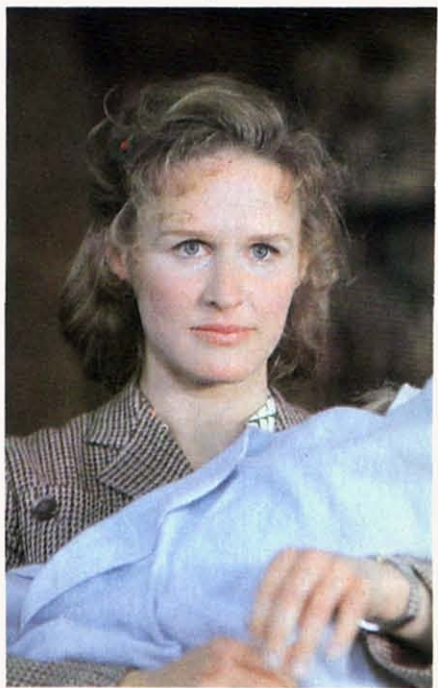
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J.P. Laffont/Sygma

Vienna would be a distraction in the film—Garp is an *American* writer—and so the move is to that traditional American haven for would-be writers, Greenwich Village.

Irving fans will also miss the short stories within the novel, particularly "The Pension Grillparzer" (young Garp's first effort at fiction). The story was not included in the sale of the novel to Warners; Irving may decide to turn it into a feature film at some later date. In its place, Tesich has devised his own story-within-the-film, "The Magic Gloves," a tale that grows out of Garp's prep school and Greenwich Village experiences. And readers who have followed the comings and goings of bears in Irving's fiction will have to make do with only one appearance—a Halloween scene in which Garp and one of his sons dress in bear costumes.

Much of the novel is concerned with Garp as a writer. But how do you show the workings of the imagination on screen? What can you do besides show Garp at the typewriter, pacing back and forth, gazing off into space? (Think of Omar Sharif knitting his ample brows in *Doctor Zhivago* to show poetic concentration as the candles beside him burn low.)

Tesich boldly proposed animation. "I can't tell you how much I hope we go all out and try to make it work," he says. Hill has had animator John Canemaker do preliminary work, but he has postponed a final decision until he sees the first cut of the film—*Garp*, after all, is already a film with many risks built into it. [The final decision: no animation.]



Garp, an ardent believer in family life, at home with his wife (Mary Beth Hurt) and his children (Ian MacGregor and Nathan Babcock). Left, actress Glenn Close as Garp's mother, Jenny, carrying the infant hero.

Lunch break on the Astoria set, April 14, 1981. Almost the entire cast and crew are glued to a small television set in Garp's living room watching the Columbia Space Shuttle touch down. Anxiety amid sandwiches, Fritos, Tab, and coffee, and a Bronx cheer when Columbia coasts down the runway. The film is four days into production, having gotten off to a comfortable start with a scene in a Greenwich Village diner where Jenny interviews a whore as Garp sits by embarrassed.

George Roy Hill appears relaxed. He has a moment to chat while Miroslav Ondricek, the Czech cinematographer who did Hill's *Slaughterhouse Five* (and many of Milos Forman's films, including *Ragtime*), sets up the next shot. On the set Hill looks more like one of the electricians than the director of two of the largest-grossing films ever—*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *The Sting*. A tall man in his late fifties with strong good looks, he wears

his hair in a modified mohawk during production and dresses in baggy tan pants, a plain shirt, and an old gray sweater. He says, "I like George Bernard Shaw's remark that 'tears are the natural expression of happiness and laughter is the natural voice of despair.' *Garp* has that quality of embracing both."

The biggest headache in putting *Garp* together, according to Hill, is trying to keep in mind all the fragments that make up the story. "You lose sight of the overall plan until after you've finished shooting," he says. In many ways *Garp* will rival *Slaughterhouse Five* in complexity. (The fictional universes of Irving and Vonnegut show similarities—in both, the individual is bombarded by a bewildering array of accidents, cruelties, betrayals, and acts of selfishness and malice. But in Vonnegut a cynical, "so it goes" attitude prevails; Irving's Garp, instead, faces the world with unending energy and hope.)

Ondricek has the camera in position,



Nancy Moran/Sygma

Garp and Roberta at a women-only memorial service. Despite changes, says screenwriter Steve Tesich, the movie is faithful to the book's spirit.

focused on Jenny's room in Greenwich Village. Jenny is banging away at her typewriter, working on the autobiographical manifesto *A Sexual Suspect*, which will propel her into instant fame, fortune, power, and danger. Played by the stage actress Glenn Close, Jenny has the wiry frame of a female marathon champion, and the stern looks of a New England schoolmarm, offset by a motherly smile and warmth. "I was frightened by the part at first," says Close, who was discovered for the role while performing in *Barnum* on Broadway. "I didn't know if I could play a woman who is both hard and sensitive and who has to grow from age twenty-five to fifty-eight during the film." She credits her confidence to Hill and the two weeks of line rehearsals before shooting began.

Several weeks later, Close puts in a vigorous performance in a scene set in the Steering School infirmary, where Jenny is a nurse. She discovers a girlie magazine tucked in baby Garp's crib and knows intuitively which boy is guilty. Storming over to his bed, she barks out: "A word of warning, you filthmonger. If you expose my baby one more time to cheap shots like this, I'll inoculate your jockstrap with bubonic plague and it'll do such a job on you that you'll have nothing left to even scratch down there. Understand?" The boy withers under her wrath. Then in a quieter

tone, she says, "Fine. Well, good-night then, Bosworth. Sleep well." She tucks another boy in before leaving the room.

"Lovely," says Hill, who shoots the scene only one more time before moving on.

"I like Shaw's remark," says Hill, "that 'tears are the natural expression of happiness and laughter is the natural voice of despair.' *Garp* embraces both."

Astoria is a huge cavern in Queens that resembles an airplane hangar large enough to house several jumbo jets. Production designer Henry Bumstead has had no trouble putting up sets for all the interiors. These include the infirmary, Garp's house, the Greenwich Village apartment, and the gymnasium for the wrestling

scenes. At the moment, Bumstead is in a far corner of the studio supervising the construction of the gym.

A production designer for more than forty years, Bumstead has worked with everyone from Alfred Hitchcock (four films, including *Vertigo*) to Clint Eastwood. And he has worked on all Hill's films since he "built" the ruins of Dresden for *Slaughterhouse Five*. (He received an Academy Award for his work on *The Sting*.) Bumstead, who has the jolly looks and humor of a Falstaff, is a perfectionist who is constantly working against the pressures of the clock, the calendar, and the budget.

"We've prefabbed most of the sets in three and a half weeks, when it usually takes several months," he says with a mixture of pride and worry. Studio space is tight in New York, and, like planes backed up on a runway, film projects wait in line to use Astoria. *Garp* has had to wait for *Rollover* to clear out, and must itself finish in time so that several other major productions can move in.

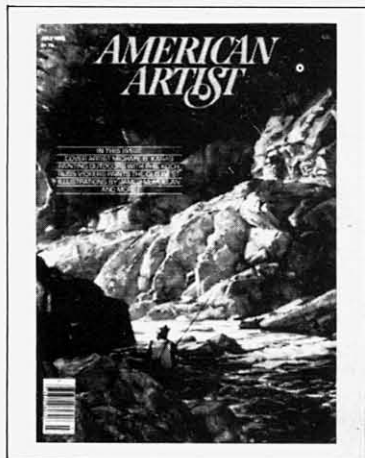
The April 28 shoot is not at Astoria but at Lincoln Park Airfield in New Jersey. The scene is scheduled for one take only. It's very simple.

While Garp and his wife, Helen (Mary Beth Hurt), are out house hunting with a real estate agent, a small plane skims by overhead and then crashes into the back of a house they are considering. Garp immediately turns to the agent and agrees to take it. "It's been predisastered. We should be safe here," he remarks. The scene is not in the book, and Tesich wrote it not really thinking *if* or *how* it could be done. Hill is not the kind of director to jump at the chance to add *Star Wars* technology to a film. But, as a flyer himself since the age of sixteen, Hill started thinking about the crash scene, Tesich reports, before he worked on anything else in the script.

It's eight o'clock on a foggy morning, and Hill, wearing a red St. Louis Cardinals baseball cap, pauses when asked why he didn't use a model. "Well, it's simple," he says with a smile. "The pilot, Jim Appleby, couldn't fit into a model!"

The stunt has never been done before. Appleby is to fly his small Aeronca Champ 7AC into the house—actually a fake front—at a speed of fifty m.p.h. and at an impact force of what is calculated to be 8.8 Gs. The crash area is made of balsa wood, and Bumstead has built the set around two telephone poles sunk sixteen feet apart and designed to rip the wings off the plane.

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Behind the set is a specially designed nylon net that is *supposed* to catch the plane.

Hill claims there is little danger. But Appleby and his wife, Zona, who is his partner in an antique-plane company and also a pilot, point out the variables. These include attaining the right height (sixteen feet), maintaining the right speed (forty-eight to fifty m.p.h.), and hitting on target. Four feet off in any direction and Appleby would hit a real wall, with a force of thirty Gs.

Appleby is also quick to point out what he has going for him. Experience is number one. He has for years been one of Hollywood's best stunt pilots and has done several films for Hill, most notably *The Great Waldo Pepper*. But at fifty-six, he looks a bit stiff. He explains that he has just recovered from a crack-up in Nevada in which he totaled a triplane. "Nothing serious, mind you, just a broke back, eleven stitches over this eye, and I couldn't move my jaw. Minor injuries!"

He has also researched the stunt. "This stunt is about seventy-five percent based on research," he says. "And twenty-five percent W. A. G." W. A. G.?

"Wild Ass Guess!"

By nine o'clock the fog has burned off, and Hill gives Appleby the go-ahead. The most nervous looking man around is the FAA official who gave permission for the stunt. Appleby lifts off, with only a minimal amount of gas in the tank, and cruises toward the house. The plane hits the house with an echoing thud, goes in, and disappears. That was not supposed to happen. The tail should be sticking out.

The crew rushes in, and two minutes later a thumbs-up sign is passed along. Another day the company will return, put the tail out, and shoot the pilot sticking his head out of the wreckage and asking, "You folks all right?" It's followed by a line Hill has added to the script: "May I use your phone?" To which Garp replies, "Yeah, if you can find it!" With Appleby returning to California, an actor is needed to play the pilot. A conspiracy forms and Hill is tapped for the role—his first appearance in any of his films.

An evening shoot at the Anabelle Diner on Main Street in Tuckahoe, Westchester County. Hill, sitting in the dark at the wheel of his Winnebago while a thunderstorm rages outside, is asked to name his favorite scene in *Garp*. "I would hate to characterize myself as a cynic," he says without hesitation, "but I believe that nothing ever ends happily. The best mo-

ments are those simple ones. I like the scene in which Garp has had an ordinary day at home and as they sit down to a dinner he has prepared, he tells Helen, 'Sometimes you can have a whole lifetime in a day and not notice that this is as beautiful as life gets. I had a beautiful life today!'"

Robin Williams, nursing a beer, is sitting with his wife at a table in the American Legion Hall on Fishers Island off the Connecticut coast. *Garp*, he says, is a further step in a new direction for him—away from television and toward film (he already has several other projects in mind), as well as toward more varied roles. He compares Robert Altman (the director of *Popeye*) with Hill. "The difference between the two," he says in his clipped speech, "is the difference between a mad uncle and a

John Irving accepts the need for an adaptation to take liberties. "Film is instant and two-dimensional; in a novel there is the narrative voice that directs you."

father: Altman is the mad uncle who gives you a lot of freedom and says, 'Have fun!' And George is like a father: You respect him. With him I don't have to worry about my performance."

Garp has quietly but completely taken over Fishers Island, a dot of land that serves as a playground for the rich. The only notice on the community bulletin board on the town common reads, "Cad-dies Wanted." There are no public beaches. One expects to see Gatsby's grandson sailing by. Hill employed luck, charm, and pull to get the use of one of the most majestic of the mansions for several weeks of shooting. (Woody Allen had wanted to do part of *Interiors* on the island, but was turned down.) The house is imposing, and the view of the sea with its "Under Toad" (Garp's younger son's understanding of "undertow") exactly right to add a cosmic dimension to the film. Sixty women and children from the island have been recruited as inhabitants in Jenny's home, a refuge for women with damaged psyches.

While Williams sips his beer, Hill runs the May 29 dailies showing Roberta's return to the house after an unsuccessful singles' cruise. Garp and Helen are there, too, recovering from the auto accident and its tragic and absurd results—one of Garp's sons died and Helen's graduate-student lover lost his sexual member. How was the crash scene itself handled? Tesich says he wasn't sure how to deal with it, but both he and Irving credit Hill with the perfect solution.

After the rushes, dinner is served by the production caterers—a choice of meat loaf or salmon, with French and American wines. The postdinner conversation is as sparkling as the wine. Irving, who has just arrived on the set with his family, Lithgow, Williams and his wife, and Mary Beth Hurt trade jokes, observations, and impersonations. Lithgow cracks up the group with an imitation of an American Express ad: "Hi, I'm Roberta Muldoon. Perhaps you remember me as Robert Muldoon, tight end for the Philadelphia Eagles." Williams takes it up: "Hi, I'm Jimmy Hoffa. Perhaps you haven't seen me around for a while"—and then does an amazingly accurate imitation of a cement mixer.

Between bursts of humor there is time for reflection. Lithgow considers Roberta's importance in the film. Everyone in *Garp* is damaged or injured, but Roberta is unusual in that she has *chosen* to be what she is. Garp calls her the only "normal" person around, and in many ways she is. She sees both sides, and she has insight and warmth. "Transsexuality," Lithgow says, "is about the basic mystery of life. What is it like to get inside the body, the nature, of someone of the opposite sex? Love is in part the attraction to that mystery. Transsexuals are those who have gone ahead and crossed the line."

Irving, relieved that he has finished his new novel, is looking forward to his small role. He recognizes the need for a film adaptation to take liberties with the work it's based on. "I'm a narrative man," he states, "and I see the main problem of the film as one of tone and narrative flow. Film is instant and two-dimensional, whereas in a novel there is the narrative voice that is a *presence*, that directs you. *Garp* is a domestic comedy that gets serious very quickly. The catch is to control the rhythm so that it doesn't move *too fast*!" ■

Andrew Horton, who has been chairman of the film department at Brooklyn College, will teach at the University of New Orleans this fall. He has completed a book on the films of George Roy Hill.

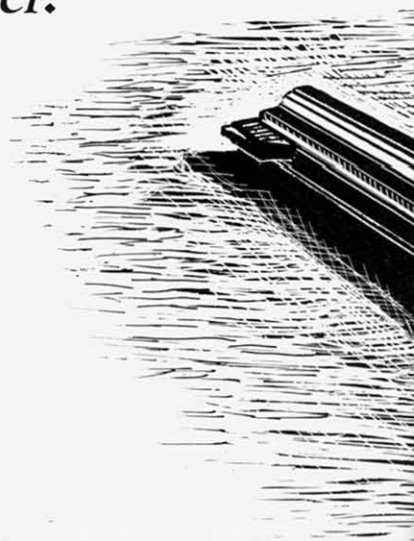
On a cold Thursday night last November, Ted Tolwinski sat in the living room of his modest four-room apartment near Chicago and watched *The Deer Hunter* on television. Leaning forward on the couch, he stared intently as two American soldiers, played by Robert De Niro and Christopher Walken, were taken prisoner by the Vietcong, held in half-submerged cages infested by large, hungry water rats, and forced to risk their lives in a game of Russian roulette for the amusement of their captors. The two prisoners survived and escaped, but toward the end of the film, Tolwinski watched another scene, even more harrowing. De Niro returns to Saigon to rescue his buddy and finds Walken, now hooked on heroin, voluntarily playing Russian roulette in a sleazy gambling den. Ignoring De Niro's anguished protests, Walken points the large revolver at his head one last time, pulls the trigger, and blows his brains out.

On the following Saturday night, Tolwinski went out with an old pal he hadn't seen in a while and they got drunk. The friend had a gun, which they locked in the trunk of Ted's car while they barhopped. Returning home later that evening, Ted carried the gun into the apartment and woke his wife. He sat at the kitchen table, took some bullets out of the gun, and placed them on the Formica tabletop. Assuring his wife that there was nothing to fear, the twenty-six-year-old tool- and diemaker and father of two sons spun the cylinder, pointed the gun at his head, and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. Then he did it again. His wife tried to take the gun away from him, but Ted kept insisting there was no danger. Looking into her eyes, he spun the cylinder, placed the muzzle against his head, and pulled the trigger a third time. The gun went off, shattering the quiet of the early morning hour with ear-splitting finality.

Twenty-eight people died from playing Russian roulette—apparently after watching *The Deer Hunter*.

CAN MOVIES KILL?

Peter Koper



Russian roulette is a curious game. Reputedly invented by czarist soldiers to allay their boredom at cold, remote outposts, the game represents the final gamble. Only one person need play and the rules are simple—load a revolver with a single live round, spin the cylinder, put the muzzle to your head, and squeeze the trigger.

The Russian roulette player must bring to the game a peculiar attitude toward the basic question of existence. A person who commits suicide presumably wants death, and a person who does not destroy himself chooses life. The Russian roulette player, however, is uncommitted, tossing the decision to fate. In this sense, the game requires a sort of mad courage, or an awesome suspension of judgment that most people would call insane, absurd, or just plain stupid.

"I think those scenes [in *The Deer Hunter*] influenced him," says someone who knew Ted Tolwinski well. "Maybe he wanted to prove he could do it, that it was only a game. He liked fantasy, he thought he would be a hero, that he could win—just like it happened in the movie."

Michael Cimino's *Deer Hunter* was a critical and box-office success, winning five Academy Awards after its 1978 release. Everyone who has seen the film remembers the chilling Russian roulette scenes. But what is even more chilling is the contention that in real life at least thirty-one persons, purportedly influenced by the film, played the game themselves. Three of them survived, but when Ted Tolwinski shot himself that Saturday night, he became one of an estimated twenty-eight men and boys who did not.

"In 1980 we started to notice that *The Deer Hunter* was being followed around by

death," recalls Linda Talbott of Handgun Control, Inc., an antihandgun lobby in Washington, D.C. The organization uses a clipping service to collect information on gun-related deaths, and Talbott began to pull out reported incidents of Russian roulette that could be tied to *The Deer Hunter*. These incidents have raised questions about the influence of film and television on audience behavior, the availability of handguns, First Amendment rights, broadcasters' responsibilities to the community, activities of citizens' pressure groups, and the role of violence in the media.

It is certainly not news that there are millions of "vidiots," whose eyes are glued to the cathode-ray tube. The pervasive, and largely uncharted, influence of television is obvious—it is an overwhelmingly powerful force in the acculturation of children. In the average American home the television set is on six and a half hours a day, and in many homes, it is kept on day and night—a murmuring, flickering presence that babysits children and keeps adults company. The result is that the images of television, and film, become a shared experience in the society. Small children reenact scenes in their play, young boys run around city streets punching the air with kung-fu chops, workers discuss last night's programs at the office or factory, and soap operas are the currency of continual chit-chat.

Critics like Talbott argue that television and *The Deer Hunter* proved to be a lethal combination. The Universal film is syndicated by MCA-TV, and when it was offered to the networks in 1979, all three turned it down because of the graphic violence in the crucial Russian roulette scenes. MCA-TV sold the rights to Home Box Office, which ran it nationally in May and June of 1980. The film was also offered

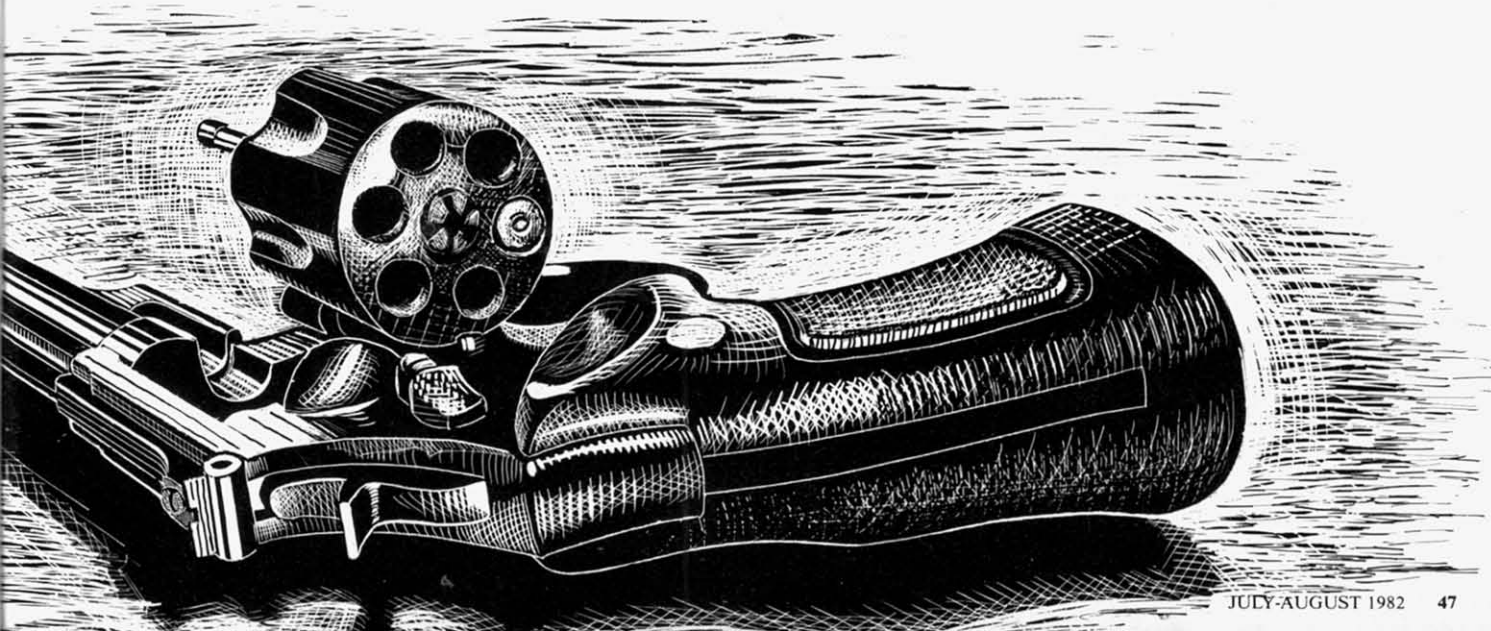
to independent broadcast stations, and was aired in Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, New York, Washington, D.C., and San Antonio, among other localities.

According to Talbott, Handgun Control alerted WOR-TV in New York to the controversy surrounding the film and worked with the station in preparing announcements to warn viewers about its violent content. The value of such announcements is dubious, however, since they may have the opposite effect of waving a red flag to attract the attention of the morbidly curious. "WOR still had two deaths following its airing of the film," says Talbott.

Freddy Saganowski was one of them. An eighth-grader at Holy Cross School in Trenton, New Jersey, Freddy was a typical thirteen-year-old, complete with braces on his teeth. The first signs of puberty were playing on his face—a little fuzz on the upper lip, a few pimples. Freddy enjoyed fishing, roller skating, riding trail bikes. He displayed a talented hand with draftsman-like drawings of rock-group logos, such as those of Styx and Kiss. He was crazy about cops and cars, and, naturally enough, his favorite television shows were "Starsky and Hutch," "The Dukes of Hazzard," and "CHiPs." His favorite movie stars were Clint Eastwood and Burt Reynolds.

"That Halloween he dressed like a policeman; he wanted to be like the guys in 'CHiPs,'" recalls his mother, Lucia. She and her husband brought up their two boys as good Catholics; their First Communion pictures hang on the imitation wood-paneled walls. An aquarium gurgles peacefully next to the large console television set.

The Saganowskis live in a small, tidy frame house. The neighborhood brings to mind the fictional Pennsylvania factory



town in *The Deer Hunter*. Hardworking families live on clean, modest streets; workingmen's bars are situated on many of the corners; and the smokestacks of the Home Rubber Company darken the end of the road, two blocks from the Saganowski's house.

On November 4, 1980, Freddy and his brother, Johnny, watched the first of two parts of *The Deer Hunter* being broadcast on WOR. "We talked about how bad they had it there, and about when they started playing the Russian roulette," remembers Johnny. Two weeks later, Johnny and Freddy were home alone after school in their upstairs bedroom. Freddy found his father's unloaded .38 Police Special in a closet. He picked up a bullet and loaded it into the cylinder. Putting it up to his head, he looked at Johnny, who was laying back on the bed watching, and pulled the trigger. The gun went off.

"I'm pretty sure he got the idea from the movie," speculates Freddy's father, Godfried. "And sometimes he wanted to show off a little bit. He probably said, 'Ah, I can do the same thing like in the movie.' He probably took the gun out and wanted to be a tough guy. He wanted to show Johnny how to do it."

Johnny, who is soft-spoken and reticent in front of strangers, believes that Freddy put the bullet in directly to the right of the chamber, thinking that the cylinder would revolve clockwise. But when the trigger is pulled on a .38 Smith & Wesson, it moves the cylinder counter-clockwise. So when the hammer came down, it hit the live round.

After the tragic incident, Freddy's friends at school, under the direction of their social studies teacher, formed a group to protest violence and sex on television. They even took a bus to WTAF-TV in

Philadelphia to protest its scheduled showing of *The Deer Hunter*. "They didn't want to talk to us. They locked themselves in and they didn't want to hear us," says Mrs. Saganowski.

Mr. Saganowski, a large man who at home wears a white T-shirt and slippers, says that he was offered a cable television service but turned it down. "Like things are nowadays, with these TV programs, especially now with cable TV, they are showing more violence and more sex. What can you do?"

In August 1980, Handgun Control began sharing its information with the National Coalition on Television Violence (NCTV), a group that monitors television and film, urges consumer boycotts of products advertised during violent shows, and lobbies for less violence in the media. Both organizations now keep a running list of persons they claim to be victims of Russian roulette incidents attributed to the influence of *The Deer Hunter*. They begin in February 1980, and the victims range in age from eight to thirty-one, and reside in fifteen different states. Many station managers, broadcast executives, and communications scholars are skeptical of the lobbyists' claims, and argue that to demonstrate a convincing correlation between *The Deer Hunter* and the deaths, each case must be looked at individually. An examination of a random sampling drawn from one list reveals circumstances as various as the individuals involved. Some incidents seem clearly related to the viewing of the film; others seem entirely unrelated.

Matt Cianciulli III, a Philadelphia teenager, shot himself last November 4 while playing Russian roulette at his kitchen table while a friend looked on—the same day *The Deer Hunter* aired on Channel 29. But his father points out that when the tuner

was checked, it was on Channel 3. He blames sensation-mongering reporters for making the connection between the film and his son's death.

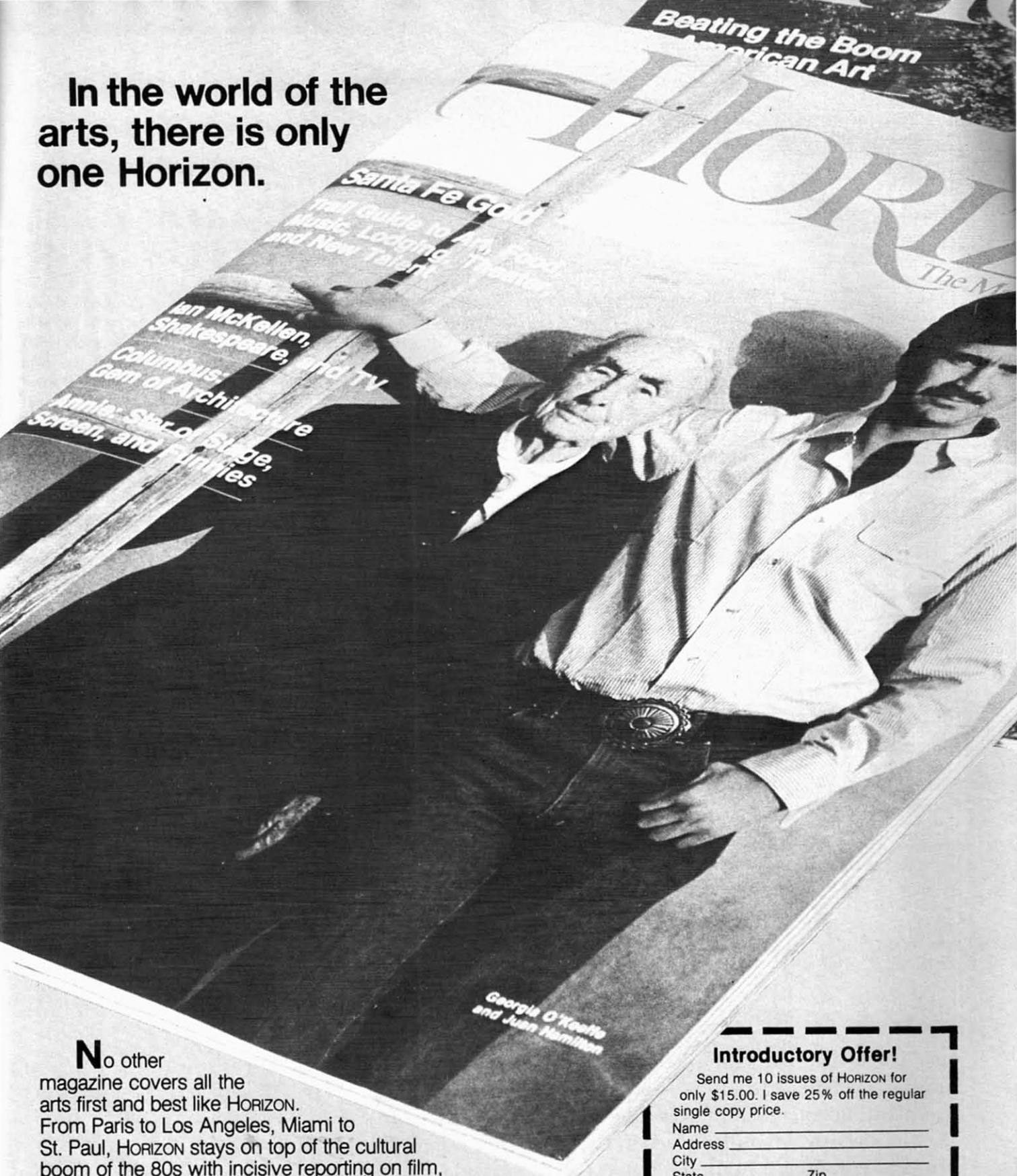
David Radnis's case is similarly inconclusive. The twenty-eight-year-old self-employed plumber watched the movie with his wife in their suburban Woodridge, Illinois, home. Two days later, the couple argued and the wife left the house. Drunk, Radnis called some friends, who came over to talk; as they sat around the kitchen table, he abruptly walked into his bedroom and returned with a revolver. "He had one slug in the gun; then he put it up to his head one time and it clicked. The second time he did it, the bullet was in there," says a member of the Radnis family who denies that there was a connection between the viewing of *The Deer Hunter* and the fatal game. According to the same source, Radnis had a drinking problem.

But Brian Jackson, also twenty-eight, died leaving his relatives convinced that there was a connection between the film and his death. A plating-plant worker who had been stationed in Germany during a three-year army stint, he had recently purchased a videocassette recorder, and one of the first cassettes he bought was a copy of *The Deer Hunter*. Shortly thereafter, he invited his parents over to his home in South Holland, Illinois, to see the movie.

Jackson, who worked nights, arrived at his brother's house around six o'clock one morning in January 1981. He was carrying an unloaded Colt .357 Magnum revolver, a powerful weapon. He woke his brother up, fixed himself a vodka and orange juice, and started to tell about having played Russian roulette in the service. He demonstrated with the unloaded gun, and then went back to his car and retrieved a hollow-point bullet. Back in the kitchen, he loaded the

"*The Deer Hunter* seemed to hit home with a lot of people, the whole crowd that hangs around in taverns and things like that," says Elizabeth Jackson, whose son died playing Russian roulette in 1981. "When I saw *The Deer Hunter*, I could see the young guys hanging around and the things they were doing. I could feel that was part of my son, too—and his crowd." She describes her son as being "a close person; he held a lot in."

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bullet into the cylinder, having a little trouble snapping it shut. Leaning against the kitchen counter and looking at his brother, he shot himself.

"*The Deer Hunter* seemed to hit home with a lot of people. Because the things the fellows did, the whole crowd that hangs around in taverns and things like that," says Elizabeth Jackson, Brian's mother. "I think it had a lot more meaning than the violence in other movies." She adds, "When I saw *The Deer Hunter*, I could see the young guys hanging around and the things they were doing. I could feel that that was part of my son, too—and his crowd." She describes her son as being "a close person; he held a lot in."

Although Mrs. Jackson believes the film had some connection with her son's fatal actions, she also notes that "film or no, you've got to have some common sense of what's going to happen to you. Hell, I'm a fatalist, but I don't run out in front of a car to see if it's my day."

Included in the NCTV and Handgun Control lists of alleged *Deer Hunter* Russian roulette shootings are the three survivors, one of whom is Stewart Robinson, a Muncie, Indiana, boy who was one day short of his twelfth birthday at the time of the episode. Stewart had seen the movie on HBO within a month of the time he played the game—June 1980. A healthy boy who is big for his age, Stewart was a bit of a show-off. He took three other boys to an upstairs bedroom in his home and showed them rifles that his father had in a gun rack. Trying to impress his friends, Stewart decided to show them the fully loaded .38 Police Special kept on the top shelf of a closet. He took out five rounds, spun the cylinder, put the gun to his head, and pulled the trigger.

The bullet entered Stewart's skull in the upper left portion of his forehead, at the widow's peak. It traveled through the frontal lobe of the brain and exited in the upper rear portion of the skull. Miraculously, Stewart survived. "He still doesn't have full use of his left side," reports Jan Robinson, the boy's father. "We didn't know if he could walk again for a while. He's made a remarkable comeback."

He adds that the rifles were unloaded, but that the revolver was kept loaded for security. "I've had both my sons out shooting, trying to teach them gun safety, this kind of thing. I thought he was at the age when we wouldn't have to worry, that he'd know better than to play with it."

Stewart, who is still somewhat clumsy but continues to play energetically with his friends, hasn't said much about the incident. Doctors told the family that because of the trauma involved, he may never remember exactly what happened. His parents still don't know for sure if he was actually intent on playing the game or if it was an accidental pull of the trigger.

Stewart's father is convinced that the movie was connected with his son's actions. "In my mind," he says, "I'm sure that's where he got the idea. He never heard of Russian roulette or anything like that until he saw that movie. I've never been one to police them that much, because I always thought they were levelheaded enough and intelligent enough to take TV with a grain of salt, and not identify with the violence." The revolver, he adds, is "not available any more."

Just as television sets have become pieces of furniture as familiar as chairs and tables—indiscriminately spewing out an unending collage of images into our living rooms—guns have likewise come to occupy a familiar place in the American home.

The gun is as common a household object as a spatula. The technological cat has been let out of the bag, and both guns and violence in media are a part of the modern landscape.

John W. Hinckley, Jr., the twenty-seven-year-old who shot President Ronald Reagan in the spring of 1981, found easy access to a gun and reportedly told his attorneys that the idea to assassinate the president occurred to him after he had seen *Taxi Driver*. Hinckley even claimed that his bizarre behavior was an effort to win the affection of Jodie Foster, the actress who starred as a young prostitute in that movie.

What appears to be a contagion of media-suggested self-destruction is not limited to the United States. Japanese youths have committed suicide in imitation of a puppet show that traces the tragic story of two lovers. And in prewar Europe young people reportedly killed themselves after hearing a sad tango called "The Last Sunday."

"Whatever we do is because of the stories we are told. These stories may be told by our grandmothers, or maybe by our movies," observes Dr. George Gerbner, professor of communications and dean of the Annenberg School of Communications. "Indeed, we do formulate our image of the world and of proper and improper and other kinds of behavior according to storytellers. But it would be absurd and impossible to hold the storyteller responsible for someone acting out the story."

Michael Cimino was unavailable for comment on the contention that his film may have inspired the Russian roulette deaths. Joann Carelli, one of Cimino's producers, seems tired of answering this sort of question. "That's a joke," she says. "Let's get serious. If someone gets shot, does that mean that someone else watched

Just as television sets have become pieces of furniture as familiar as chairs and tables—indiscriminately spewing out an unending collage of images into our living rooms—guns likewise occupy a familiar place in the American home. The gun is as common a household object as the spatula. The technological cat has been let out of the bag, and both guns and violence in media are a part of the modern landscape.

a program on television and decided to shoot somebody?"

Dr. Thomas Radecki, chairman of NCTV, feels differently. "They can't wash their hands of the death their film is causing," he says about the syndicator of *The Deer Hunter*. (His media antiviolenence lobbying group says that it wants MCA-TV to withdraw the movie in order to cut the crucial Russian roulette scenes.) Radecki, who is a psychiatrist and a faculty member of the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, states that "the Russian roulette scenes in *The Deer Hunter* are clear incitements of imminent violence. The First Amendment was certainly not meant to protect gratuitous Russian roulette scenes that never occurred in reality."

There is no shortage of critics ready to saw off the legal limb Radecki has crawled out on. According to Nat Hentoff, *Village Voice* columnist and student of First Amendment controversies, "It is a First Amendment problem only if the government, the FCC or Congress, comes in [to censor broadcasts of the film]. You can't tell these days with the federal courts, but I don't think it would stand up." He says that a clear, systematic relationship of cause and effect would have to be proved, and that is impossible. On the other hand, Hentoff feels that NCTV is well within its rights to launch consumer boycotts against advertisers in order to pressure the media to lower the level of violence.

"The same kind of First Amendment rights that apply to the print medium should apply to cable and pay television," says Robbin Ahrold, director of public relations for HBO. NCTV has criticized the pay movie channel for showing *The Deer Hunter* as well as for the violent content of some of its other programming. "*The Deer Hunter* was one of the highest-rated movies

we've ever played on HBO," Ahrold continues. "The pay television channel is something the individual subscriber brings into his home by his own free will. It is not an unidentified flying object; you actually have to write out a check each month."

But a broadcast channel is a different animal than a cable channel or a movie theater. Under licensed regulation, broadcasters have to be responsible to community standards. Do they have the right to show the Russian roulette scenes in *The Deer Hunter*? "I don't think there is any question that we have the right to run the movie," says Robert Hartman, vice-president and general manager of WFLD-TV in Chicago. Dr. Radecki sent him a letter predicting Russian roulette deaths if the station aired the movie. Nine days later there were two fatalities.

"I'm not qualified to explain what people did," says Hartman. "I don't know anybody who can state that because somebody watched a movie, they took their own life." He notes that eighty percent of the heavy mail and phone response to the airing was favorable and that *The Deer Hunter* had a phenomenal 25 rating and 35 share. "Those people told us unequivocally that they wanted that movie on television. Do you want me to make the decisions on the movies that you see? Or do you want to make the decision?" Neither FCC regulations nor the National Association of Broadcasters code was violated by the airing of the film, according to another station manager.

"Both the language and the violence were necessary parts of the movie and were probably pretty accurate reflections," says John Rose, station manager of WDCA-TV in Washington, D.C. He states that if a direct cause-and-effect relationship were ever established between media and the

actions of individuals, the dissemination of books, television, radio, and other forms of communication would be impossible. Rose also points out that response ran two to one in favor of the showing of the movie. Of the negative reaction, "very few commented on the violence; they were all commenting on the language." It seems curious that in almost all instances when viewers complain about *The Deer Hunter* or other programming, they are more likely to be prudishly troubled by four-letter words than by pilage, mayhem, rape, and murder unfolding on their home screens.

Violence comes in different forms. The violence in *The Deer Hunter*, including the Russian roulette scenes, is necessary, organic, and effective. *The Deer Hunter* is a long way from a film like *I Spit on Your Grave*, which has made walkouts of even the most hardened fans of grade-B gore movies. Before the sixties, violence in the media consisted of gangsters or cowboys with black, dime-size holes on white shirts to mark the bullet wound. These days, gaping, puffy pink flesh and buckets of mucous glycerin blood mark the spot.

Violence is no stranger to art and entertainment, having made its debut on the Western stage with Greek tragedy. Despite the escalation of violence in recent American movies, it seems foolish, shortsighted, and probably unconstitutional to hold the people who make these films responsible for what other people do after seeing them. The responsibility of the storyteller is to tell the story, and the responsibility for behavior lies with the individual. And that includes those unfortunate individuals who acted out their impulses in games of Russian roulette after watching *The Deer Hunter*. ■

Peter Koper lives in New York and is working on his first novel, *The Man With No Face*.

DISNEY LOOKS FOR A HAPPY ENDING TO ITS GRIM FAIRY TALE

In the last few years, audiences have stayed away from Disney films in droves. Now the studio is playing down its Mickey Mouse image to win them back.

Bart Mills

The facts of life were never Walt Disney's strong point. His films, whether animated (*Snow White*) or live-action (*Pollyanna*), often glossed over them, painting a sunny view of the world, with, at most, a few villainous clouds that were easily dispersed in time for the last reel. Disney didn't need to bother with the facts of life. His formula was so successful that even *Fantasia*, a rare Disney flop during its initial release, eventually became a popular classic.

Nevertheless, certain ugly realities of the changing marketplace finally caught up with the Disney formula. After Walt's death in 1966, the studio kept churning out sweet, gentle family films, but the families stopped coming, at least in the numbers that had helped the studio weather most of the postwar storms that buffeted the rest of Hollywood. For one thing, there were fewer and smaller families—the birthrate had declined sharply, leaving Disney with fewer young fans. Moreover, those youngsters seemed to be growing up faster, demanding more sophistication in their movies.

Although the studio still came up with

successes like *The Love Bug* and *The Rescuers*, the misses, especially in the live-action category, began to substantially outnumber the hits. The studio's share of the American box office declined from seven percent in 1976 to only four percent in 1981.

Periodically, Disney would announce that it was shedding its G-rated image, but the ensuing product, whether *The Black Hole* or *The Devil and Max Devlin*, would prove that PG could be as stultifying as G. The refrain in the film community was: "What a great studio Disney used to be." When films like *The Black Stallion* were released by other studios and captured the family audience, critics would twist the knife: "This is the kind of film Disney made once upon a time." Directors inserted Disney homages in their films (like Steven Spielberg's use of *Dumbo* in 1941) as if to say, "Too bad Walt's gone."

Elegiac articles began appearing: "Wishing Upon a Falling Star at Disney" (*New York Times Magazine*), "Teen Formula Eludes Disney Movie-Makers" (*Wall Street Journal*). Fast friends gave tearful eulogies: "The magic from Burbank has been so deep-grained a part of all of our

lives that when it falters all childhood seems endangered" (Charles Champlin, *Los Angeles Times*).

In the field of animated features, where Disney pioneered and once reigned supreme, bolder spirits, such as Ralph Bakshi, emerged, proclaiming their contempt for the Disney style and approach. In 1979 half of Disney's animators walked off the lot and set up their own studio, Don Bluth Productions. In addition, top film talent had already begun to steer clear of Disney's live-action features. When a well-known performer like Elliott Gould signed a multipicture deal with Disney, it was regarded in some quarters as a desperation career move, akin to working in Canada. Even television turned sour for Disney when NBC canceled "Disney's Wonderful World" after a Sunday-night run of twenty years. (The show, retitled "Walt Disney," was picked up by CBS.)

The conservatively managed company has tried to see the bright side of the hemorrhaging in its film and television division. This spring, when the trade press reported that Disney Productions' profits were off twenty-seven percent for the first six months of fiscal 1982, the company

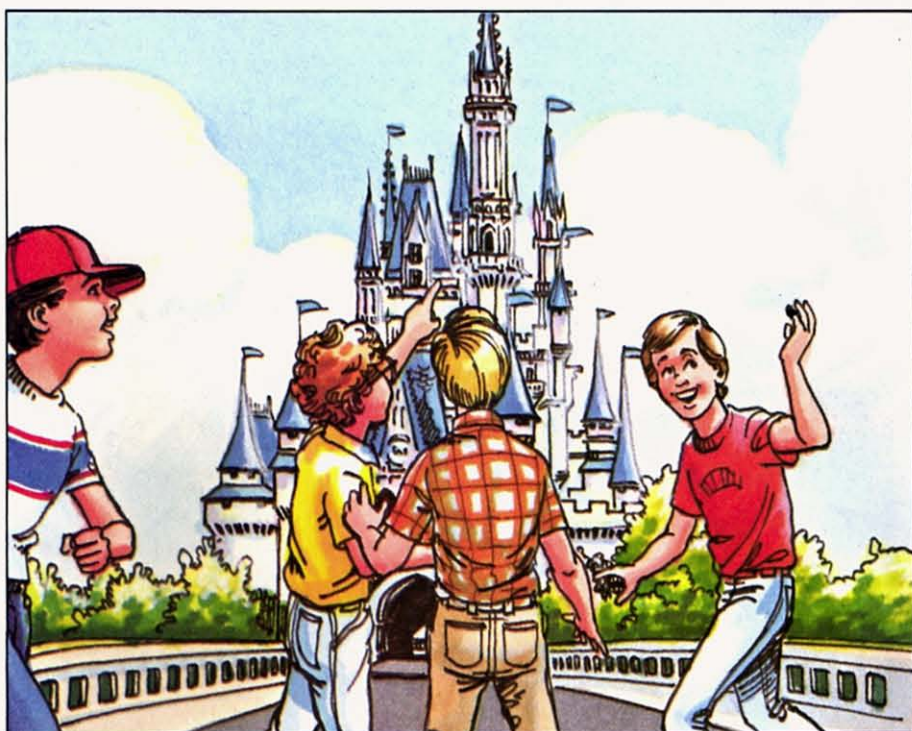
pointed to its booming earnings (\$14 million) in home video sales during the same period. Besides, films and television have become a less important part of the overall Disney profit picture; over the past decade, their contribution to corporate income has dropped from a half to a quarter. It's the theme-park income and merchandising royalties that have kept the stockholders smiling.

In recent years, much of the company's attention was apparently focused on its \$800 million investment in the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT), slated to open at Florida's Walt Disney World in October, and on the \$300 million Tokyo Disneyland, to open in 1983. Disney seemed eager to jump feet first into the future when it came to theme-park gambles, but its films appeared to be living in the past.

Now the company has decided on a "new blood" policy in film and television production. "We had to become competitive in the eyes of the creative community," explains company president Ron Miller. Miller stepped up from the position of production chief two years ago and began to "search outside the company for a production head who could broaden the Disney audience by producing more contemporary product."

Failing to find a suitable candidate outside, the Disney management decided in mid-1980 to implement its push into the present under Thomas L. Wilhite, twenty-nine, a former Disney publicist whose manner is quiet and self-possessed. Wilhite (formally the vice president—production, motion pictures and television) denies he's presiding over a change in image. "There's nothing wrong with the Disney image," he says. "At its heart it's a very good image. But perhaps it has come to mean merely children's movies—the kind of product parents can drop their children off to see and not have to worry about what they're watching."

"There was a period when Disney was making films to a formula," Wilhite admits. "But in the last few years—whether or not you liked *The Black Hole* in 1979—there's been the beginning of an intention to make more substantial pictures. There's been the beginning of a decision to start broadening the audience base." Wilhite hastens to add, "To broaden the audience, not divorce ourselves from the Disney image." Miller describes the changes as "a natural evolution." But as Jason Robards says of a forthcoming Disney film he stars in, "I think the message in this film is pretty much the same as in every Disney



ONCE UPON A TIME, a man named Walt Disney created a wonderful studio kingdom that made motion pictures for the whole family. Movies like *Snow White*, *Fantasia*, *Mary Poppins*...

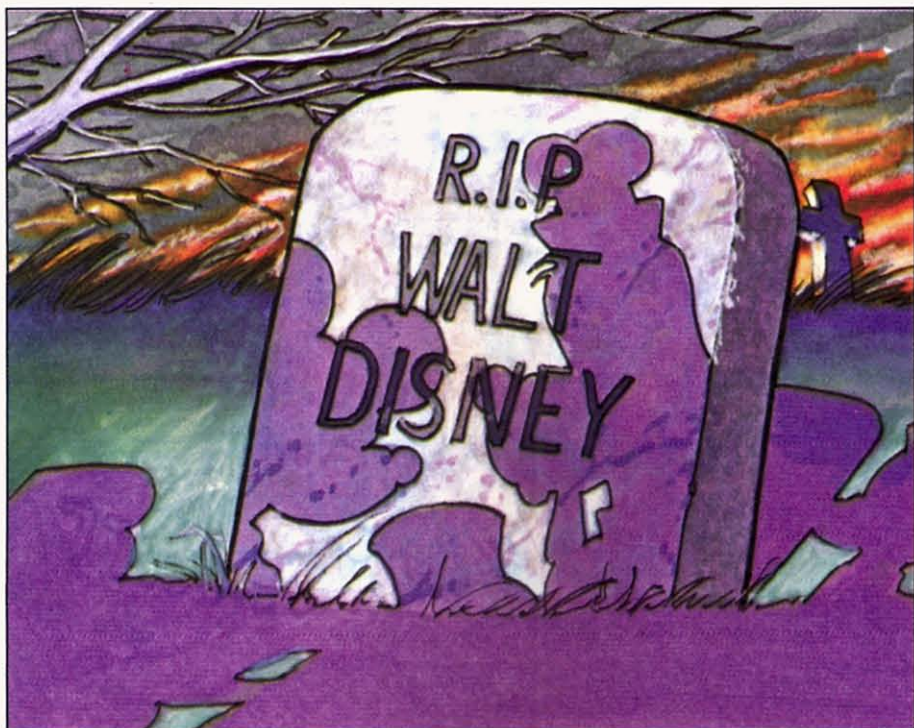
film. We're not making *La Dolce Vita* here."

This year is seeing Disney's first political film (*Night Crossing*) and its first four-letter-word film (*Tex*). And *TRON* is introducing to movies the novel animation techniques of computer graphics. At Christmas *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, the Robards film, will present the kind of phantasmagoric menace often suggested in Disney cartoons, but so far never before included in its live-action product—unless you count dear sweet Bill Cosby playing the Devil.

According to Wilhite, the problem for Disney is "to walk the line between maintaining what was good in the past and to acknowledge that there has been a tremendous change in the movie audience in the last ten to fifteen years." He admits that "people who grew up in the sixties are now parents and are raising their children with a different point of view. Children today are left more to their own devices. They're more aurally and visually aware than earlier generations were. They know what doesn't ring true to their lives."

In a year when video games are earning more money for Warner Communications than feature films, Wilhite thinks Disney is very much on kids' wavelengths in offering the \$18 million *TRON*, "the first Hollywood film dealing with electronic games." In *TRON*, Jeff Bridges plays "a video-game whiz caught in the electronic world where those games become real," and all-purpose English villain David Warner is "a power-hungry executive in a communications conglomerate whose alter ego is a feared electronic warrior."

A quarter of the film is conventional live-action photography. The rest consists of live action combined with optical effects, live action combined with computer-generated images, and straight computer graphics. Although these effects techniques have been employed in television commercials for the last decade, they have never before been used as the basis for a feature film. Steven Lisberger, *TRON*'s director, says, "In the three-quarters of the film that's set in the electronic game world, audiences won't be able to tell which images are computer generated and which are live action. People who have seen some of the sequences have guessed wrong."



THEN ONE DAY the great Walt died. All his children mourned his passing, and worried about things to come. It was a sad day at Disney.

Thirty-seven-year-old Harrison Ellenshaw—son of famed Disney matte artist Peter Ellenshaw, and assistant to his father on *The Black Hole*—was assigned to keep an eye on an outside special effects team brought in to work on *TRON*. “Until we actually put some footage together,” he says, “some people around here were very skeptical of these new kids on the block. They were saying it would take three years of postproduction, not one.” Disney veterans weren’t impressed by the six Clio Awards aggregated by the *TRON* whiz kids. Richard Taylor, co-supervisor of the team, retorts, “Our job is to wipe out a few of the cobwebs around here. Disney needs some young blood. We’re trying to create a new energy level.”

From the critical reaction to Disney’s recent work in animated features, one might conclude that it’s been cobwebs as usual along the corridors of the studio’s animation departments. Last year’s *The Fox and the Hound*, however, was a huge box-office success. Vincent Canby may have found it “overstuffed with whimsy and folksy dialogue,” but the \$12 million film became

Disney’s biggest-grossing first-run animation feature ever. To date, it has racked up \$50 million in worldwide grosses. It now becomes part of the Disney library, joining the studio’s highly profitable rotation of animated releases. (Disney’s second most profitable 1981 release was the fourth reissue of *Cinderella*, which premiered in 1950.)

For years, Disney could afford to be smug about animation. The people on top had arrived there after years of caterpillar-like progress through the ranks. But Don Bluth was a man too impatient to fit into the Disney system, whose unwritten motto, he claims, is: “Do as you’re told and be creative.” Bluth led sixteen others out Disney’s door on September 13 and 14, 1979, dates engraved on animation chief Ed Hansen’s brain as those “infamous two days.” As Hansen recalls, “Don Bluth and his clan filed into this office, one at a time, and handed in their white envelopes and drawings. I thought it wasn’t the most professional thing to do, to leave in the middle of a production [*The Fox and the Hound*].”

Now, ten miles west of the Disney studios, along Ventura Boulevard, Bluth and

his associates have a studio of their own, where they are completing work on MGM-UA’s \$6.1 million *The Secret of NIMH* for release on July 2 (a week before *TRON* will open). Bluth says he left Disney because “the people in charge there seemed content to let the standards of classical animation slip downward toward those of Saturday-morning TV.” To illustrate his claim that Disney’s standards have fallen, he recalls being told not to spend time painting in the whites of a character’s eyes for *The Rescuers*.

A ramrod-straight Texas-born Mormon, the forty-four-year-old Bluth is not the type to be a cog in anyone’s machine. “Disney’s malady,” he says, “is that they need a leader with vision.” A leader named Bluth? “Of course. Or anyone who is creative. Others could have filled the bill. Disney needs someone who can build dreams and empires of his own. Instead, they hire artists and ask them to have dreams for the corporation.”

The Bluth defection was not Disney’s first labor problem. In 1941 a group of the studio’s leading animators struck. They were fired, but went on to form the influential United Productions of America, where Mr. Magoo, among other immortals, was created. Hansen takes the long view of Disney’s more recent crisis: “On the date Bluth left we had sixteen character animators, of whom seven left. As of the present date we have twenty-three character animators and we will have thirty shortly. We have a stronger crew than we’ve had in many years.”

The Disney method of producing an animated feature takes time. Four years between releases has been the rule in recent years. Now the studio is gearing up to double its animation output. In 1984 it will release a \$20 million adventure, *The Black Cauldron*. In 1986 there will be a somewhat smaller scale animated release—possibly *Basil of Baker Street*, on which a team of five animators has already been busy for a year. The studio is also preparing a twenty-eight-minute featurette, called *Mickey’s Christmas Carol*, for this Christmas. The outgrowth of a novelty record issued nearly ten years ago, it will be the first film appearance of Mickey Mouse since 1952. And there will be twenty-one hundred feet of animation in the largely live-action *Who Censored Roger Rabbit?*, a 1983 release.

The Black Cauldron, based on *The Prydain Chronicles* (a *Lord of the Rings*-type quintet of books by Lloyd Alexander), is Disney’s attempt to match the success Ralph Bakshi had rotoscoping Middle

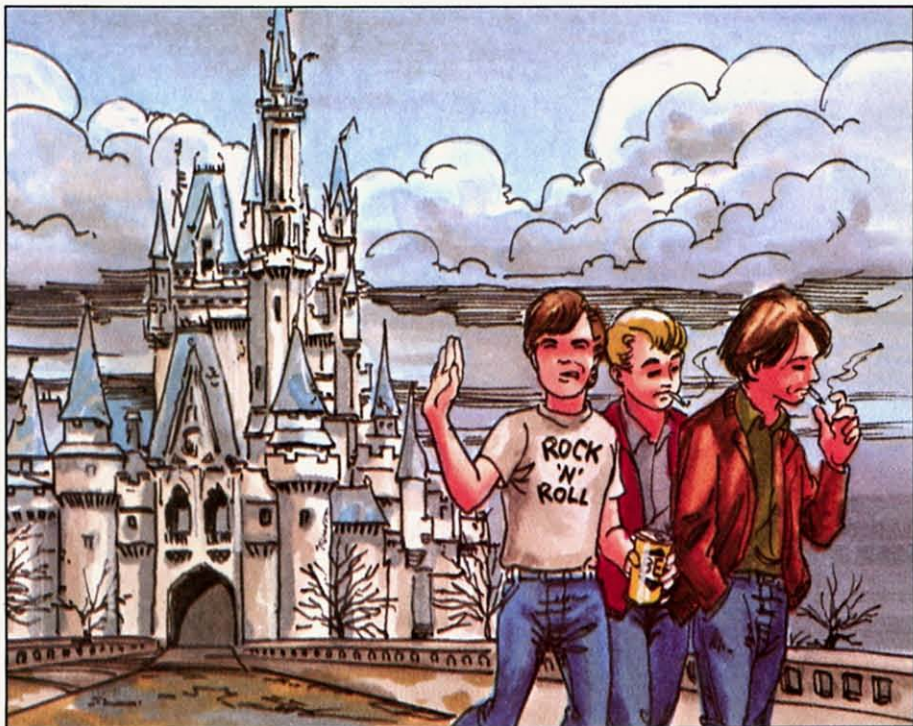
Earth. Producer Joe Hale thinks his film will tap a new audience for Disney. "Cauldron should have a broader appeal than any of our animated films for years," he claims. "It's scary enough so that people will be hiding under their seats. Our villain, the Horned King, has all the worst qualities of Hitler and Genghis Khan. Most of Disney's animated villains in the past have been fairly comic, but this guy is bad through and through."

The studio is accustomed to buying up properties and leaving them on the shelf. Disney has for thirty years owned the film rights to the dozens of literary sequels to *The Wizard of Oz* and only now is actively preparing one of them. *The Black Cauldron* had been kicking around the studio for about five years before Hale finally interested top management in a treatment in 1977. Five years later, the production still isn't in high gear. "Disney likes to pace things," Hale explains. "We plan a long way ahead so that each release will be different—no two dog pictures in a row, for instance. At the time I was getting interested in this subject, someone here sensed that kids wanted more adventure in their films, and a faster pace. So that's why we're following *The Fox and the Hound*, which was like a lullaby compared to our military band."

In general, though, it seems as if Disney doesn't intend to change its system for producing animation, relying as usual on trusted administrators to guide the inspirations of the young artists who continue to be attracted to the studio. Strong-willed individuals like Don Bluth are welcome to work elsewhere. But the situation is exactly the reverse in the live-action area, where individualism is now prized.

The greatest proof of this is that Disney has begun to offer profit participation to outsiders. (Disney board chairman E. Cardon Walker and president Ronald W. Miller have long shared in profits of particular pictures.) The first outsider to get points on his picture at Disney was director Carroll Ballard, for the upcoming *Never Cry Wolf*. As Wilhite recalls, "That deal was traumatic to a certain extent. It provoked a lot of thought and discussion about what it would mean for the studio's future. It had been traditional for us not to pay participations, but it became apparent that if we were really going to be competitive for talent, we had to do it. Even so, we have a ceiling: No more than one-third of a picture can be given away in points. And we haven't yet paid a percentage of the gross, only of net."

Disney has never sought box-office



TIMES CHANGED. Kids discovered sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. They turned from Jiminy Cricket to Jimi Hendrix. Disneyland prospered, but weeds grew along Dopey Drive.

names before, but now, Wilhite boasts, "we're perceived as a viable customer by every agent in town." The studio is wooing Richard Dreyfuss for a partly animated biography of Albert Einstein. A similar star-name policy applies on the technical side. Once Jack Clayton (*The Innocents*) was chosen to direct *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, he was allowed to bring in leading production designer Richard Macdonald (*Cannery Row*). The editor, assistant director, camera crew, costume designer, sound mixer, and others also came in from the outside; the sound and the fury could be heard on the far side of the San Gabriel Mountains. "This is two studios on the same lot," says one *Something Wicked* crew member.

Disney has always been a pleasant place to work. You can't walk ten steps on the lot without someone saying hi to you. The influx of one-picture newcomers, it is hoped, will allow some of the old rules to be broken without changing the congenial working atmosphere of the studio.

Independent producers can now set up shop at Disney. The first was Tim Zinnemann, with his film *Tex*. It stars Matt Dillon and Ben Johnson, in an Oklahoma-

based story of two teenage boys growing up without parents. Directing is Tim Hunter, from a screenplay he wrote with Charlie Haas; the two also wrote *Over the Edge*, a recent movie about disaffected teenagers that has achieved cult status. "They told me to hire the people I needed," Zinnemann recalls. "I told them that outside people are accustomed to earning above scale. They'd never paid those prices before, but that resistance lasted about five minutes. They were realistic enough to realize that if they wanted a more contemporary look and feel to the film, they were going to have to pay the prices that are now standard in the rest of the industry. Except for the sound department, I was able to bring in the people I wanted, and still finish the movie for \$4.6 million. At that price, it will be very hard for the film to lose money."

Of working with Disney brass, Zinnemann says: "The other studios are operated more by committee, so it takes longer to get decisions. At Disney, things are more direct. There isn't the game playing and ego tripping that is standard elsewhere, which eliminates a whole layer of friction."

Nelle Nugent and Elizabeth I. McCann,



YEARS WENT BY. The new rulers realized they had to change with the times. They made *Tex* and *TRON*, hoping that once again the sun would shine on the Disney kingdom.

the successful Broadway producing team (*Dracula*, *The Elephant Man*, *Nicholas Nickleby*), who have a development deal at Disney, agree with Zinnemann. "We're the hot kids on Broadway," says McCann. "Every studio wanted to make a deal with us. We chose Disney—which offered no more money—because they seem more open to off-the-wall ideas, and they have a continuity of people and outlook." Nugent adds, "They're expanding all over the place, including TV, which we're interested in. And we like their direct way of working, eliminating the usual six layers of sifters."

In television, Disney is expanding beyond its weekly network hour to a new pay cable venture with Group W Broadcasting to be called the Disney Channel. The partners have committed a combined \$100 million over the next four years for original programming. They hope to debut the channel late this year, in time for doting grandparents to stuff subscriptions into children's Christmas stockings. Gearing up for the cable launch, Disney has been busy producing pilots for the networks, and succeeded in placing "Herbie, the Love Bug" with CBS.

Some observers believe that the studio's slide since Walt Disney's death has gone so far that the studio will never regain its leading position in movies made for younger audiences. Terry Gilliam, the American-born animator in England's Monty Python's Flying Circus troupe, had inconclusive discussions with Disney before finding independent backing for *Time Bandits*. Gilliam says, "Disney is faced with the problem of toughening their films up. Disney used to make the best kids' films. I don't know who's running the show there now, but it isn't Walt."

Leonard Maltin, the film historian who wrote *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons*, says, "For too long since Walt's death, the people running Disney have been making their decisions while looking over their shoulders at what was done before. Disney should have made *Star Wars*. Instead, they hopped on George Lucas's bandwagon with *The Black Hole*, which was little more than a rehash of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*."


"There are talented people at Disney," Maltin insists, "but instead of being encouraged to develop, they are too often

hemmed in. In Disney's animated films, the problems are more in story development and choice of story than in animation itself, which remains skillful. In live action, when they do have a good film, one like *Freaky Friday* [1977], which wasn't from the same old Disney cookie cutter, they don't understand what they have. The studio shoveled it out in saturation bookings to the neighborhoods. In New York City, for example, many people were attracted by Jodie Foster and Barbara Harris and were encouraged by the reviews—but the film played only neighborhood theaters and disappeared within a week."

Wilhite's reply: "It's important that Disney start making the films 'Disney should have made.' *Ordinary People* could have been a Disney picture. People left the theater feeling hopeful, not depressed. *My Bodyguard* is another picture we could have put our name on. *Tex* proves you can do 'a Disney picture' about teenagers' problems without putting up a false front. We obviously don't belong to the school of thought that you have to give teenagers a lot of sex and violence. *Tex* isn't sugary, but it isn't violent, either. Our preview audiences, the twelves to sixteens, said they thought it was realistic."

"I don't believe there are two kinds of films, Disney and all others. People go to the movies hoping each one they see will stand up on its own, so we're advertising our films on their merits rather than as 'a Disney film.' The Disney name is prominent in our ads, but we aren't knocking people over the head with it. In the future, if we can get the business turned around, we might possibly do pictures that won't carry the Disney name, and thereby get into subjects that aren't ideally suited to Disney. For now, we feel the future of the company rests with the Disney name. Our first order of business has been to make the Disney name mean more again."

"I haven't been here that long," Wilhite admits. "In any corporation of this size, like Ford or Disney, when the strong founding father leaves, it takes a while to decide what to do next. This was Walt's toy store. He had the freedom to act that comes when you own the place. For others, it takes a while. Whether it took too long or the right amount of time, I don't know."

Wilhite is cautious about predicting the future, which in this business is only sensible. Disney may be in the doldrums now, but if *TRON* or *Tex* is a big hit, the studio will regain its former luster overnight, and Dopey Drive will once again be lined with smiling faces. 

Bart Mills writes about film from Los Angeles.

THE TEMPTATIONS OF CABLE

The promise:
cultural diversity.
The fear: invasion
of privacy.

Today, twenty-three million American homes are wired for cable. By 1990, industry officials expect that number to have tripled. The new technology has already made a distinct difference in our lives—with twenty-four-hour news, narrowcast programming for special-interest groups, first-run feature films shown several times a day, interactive experiments allowing viewers to shop, transact business, and even vote without

leaving their living rooms.

Cable's potential to transform American culture will be realized through the efforts and investments of those already in a position to shape its development. Entertainment entrepreneurs spend millions developing programming; major corporations carve up franchising plums; and broadcast networks, originally preoccupied with losing audiences to cable, have now become major contenders in the competition.

But not everyone who enters the field will make a fortune. In the following special report, Nick DeMartino presents a blueprint for the future, taking some edu-

cated guesses at who will prevail and who will not. DeMartino also wends his way through the maze of new channels now

on the drawing boards, describing the kinds of programs most likely to fill the screen in the near future.

Within a few years, the outcome of the cable contest will be clear. By then, we may also know much more about the darker side of cable. The same system that increases options for entertainment and information threatens viewers' privacy. Interactive cable can be used to gather information on viewing habits, credit ratings, and political preferences. Ben Brown takes a look at how cable may undermine democracy and bring George Orwell's vision of 1984 into our living rooms right on schedule.



Illustration by Carol Schwartz

PROMISED LAND

In the rush for riches, anything goes. Talk is big, action is fast, and the risks are high.

Nick DeMartino

It's frontier time in Televisionland—the first honest-to-John Wayne shoot-out that has ever occurred in the thirty-odd-year history of the industry. Restrained only by guts, imagination, and money, today's cable cowboys are on a three-to-five-year rampage to carve up as much of the range for themselves as they can.

The stakes are high.

Although by far the largest amounts of money are being committed in the fight to gain big-city cable franchises, the most fascinating and most risky competition is in the programming arena.

A total of at least \$300 million is being gambled by dozens of companies, both large and small, on a vast array of new television channels, many of which will be distributed via satellites that are not yet launched, and marketed to consumers over cable systems that are not yet built (or even authorized by local franchising authorities).

Satellite delivery of national programming to cable systems began in 1975, when Home Box Office started transmitting its channel of movies, sports, and specials. In seven years, nearly fifty satellite-delivered programming services have popped up. Another two dozen will debut during the next two years. As new satellites become operational, even more new services will become available.

The amazing proliferation of new programming ventures has kept up despite the fact that only a few existing services—such as HBO and the so-called superstation WTBS—are firmly in the black. Some of the services that captured industry attention early on, such as a channel for senior citizens, are still on the drawing boards. Others, like the ill-fated “BBC in America” channel, died stillborn. And at least a half-dozen channels have recently folded. The helter-skelter competition will inevitably lead, predicts Paramount executive Richard Frank, to “more failures in the next five years than at any time in the history of visual communications.”

Part of the reason is that a first-class, full-service network can cost anywhere from \$10 million to \$100 million a year to operate. Burt Harris, former chief executive of the Premiere movie network

planned by Getty Oil and four Hollywood studios, is one who knows about that challenge, and about others. Premiere, announced in 1980 with much fanfare, was declared at the end of 1981 to be in violation of antitrust laws. Harris flatly predicts that “many a programming service will fall by the wayside.”

“In the short term we know the industry just can't support everyone,” says Andrew Goldman, who recently joined Spanish International Network after serving as marketing director at Teleprompter, now Group W Cable, the nation's third-largest multiple station operator (MSO). “Some of them will fail if they don't have deep, deep pockets. I'd say that any new service will have to finance all costs for at least two or three years. That means that the majors will hang in there and will win in the end. For the little guys without substantial capitalization, it will be a very rough time.”

Although most of the new gamblers concur that there will be a high degree of risk, they differ vastly when assessing how many services will be successful. Gerald Levin, vice-president of Time Inc.'s video group, has said that “in terms of the big money,” there may only be three, four, or five advertiser-supported cable services that draw the top numbers. But he believes there will be thirty or forty others, “just like swarms of magazines,” that can still make money by reaching small segments of the cable audience.

Ellen Sachar of the Wall Street firm Goldman Sachs calculates that by 1990 there will be enough revenue to support only ten, perhaps a dozen, viable national networks, including the existing three broadcast networks.

What makes this high-stakes struggle so remarkable is the likelihood that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to determine the winners until most of the risks have been taken. Under extraordinary competitive pressures, some new ventures will never get beyond the announcement stage. In other cases, corporations will throw away millions of dollars before it becomes clear that their projects have failed.

Nevertheless, the great cable rush continues.

Why? Mainly because of the fear of being left out. “They're in there now for position,” explains Rod Warner, a telecommunications consultant who was director of marketing for Storer Cable, the fifth-largest MSO. “If you expect to make money three to five years from now, you have to weather quite a storm in the meantime.”

Communications interests—the networks, local broadcasters, publishers—are increasingly forced to act. The ravenous cable industry promises to nibble away at the foundations of today's established entertainment industry. And if cable is as successful as everyone now seems to believe it will be, the wire into American

homes will become the primary method of reaching audiences.

The longer a corporation delays entering the fray, the more expensive it becomes. Every time another network is introduced, the chance of achieving profitability is delayed a bit longer, because each new entrant is forced to spend more than its predecessors on the three indispensable components in the cable networking business: program production, distribution, and exhibition.

For the movie business, this used to mean owning the theaters as well as the studios and distribution organizations. In cable television, it means the ability to acquire a steady and reasonably priced stream of programming, one or more satellite slots (transponders), and access to a channel on as many of the forty-seven hundred cable systems as possible.

If the programmer skimps on the programming, he risks creating a service that cable operators, viewers, and advertisers will not bother with. To build a full channel of programming from scratch, as Ted Turner did with his Cable News Network, is enormously expensive. Turner lost \$10 million in 1981. And once a channel is on the air, there is no way to take a breather. Money flows out for programs, no matter how many people are watching.

The costs of satellite distribution, although lower than those of microwave—which broadcast networks still use—have skyrocketed because of demand. Once, a programmer could find a satellite berth for less than \$1 million per year. The prices for the new satellite transponders will be ten to twenty times that amount. And there may be an even bigger problem. Since a great deal of the existing desirable cable programming is beamed from one RCA satellite, most cable systems have pointed their single receiving dish at that location in the sky. New networks, if they lease a transponder on a different satellite, must either buy a receiving dish for each of their affiliates, or risk beaming programming that fewer cable systems can receive. Until cable systems are willing to buy two, three, or more receiving dishes, new entrants are forced to risk a great deal of money on untested distribution means or fork over enormous sums to buy or lease already occupied transponders on the main cable satellite.

Additional cable dishes will be added more slowly, if only because nearly seventy percent of existing cable systems have only twelve channels to program—and most of these are already filled up. Thus the channels for all of the dozens of new networks will be available only when the new, high-capacity cable systems with fifty-four or more channels—which will take five years to complete—are built in large cities, or when existing systems decide it is worth the millions necessary to expand beyond twelve channels. In either case, the cable programmer is likely to be up against a

considerable wait before he can hope to stop the flow of red ink.

The new cable networks also have to spend huge amounts of money promoting their services to cable operators. Elaborate and expensive promotional efforts, aimed at wooing operators, are as necessary as the expenditures for programming and distribution.

Signing up affiliated cable systems is crucial for all new channels, especially for those intending to use advertising. Advertisers want to know how many people are watching. At present, computation by the A.C. Nielsen Co.'s twelve hundred metering devices is the most reliable method of measuring the size of a cable channel's audience. Because Nielsen requires a minimum number of potential viewing homes in

The amazing proliferation of new programming ventures has kept up despite the fact that only a few existing services are firmly in the black.

order to add a cable ad service to its count, only a handful of the top cable systems are eligible. Everyone else must rely on phone surveys or the "diary" method, both of which are less reliable, since they depend on viewers remembering what they watched. This is pretty difficult when a cable viewer has twenty or thirty channels

to remember.

The pay channels, of course, are as curious as the ad channels about ratings. But they can use the ultimate audience-measurement system: People are required to pay a fee if they want the service. The only problem is, most of the existing home terminal equipment has flaws that allow the consumer to tune in a service without paying for it. Until more cable operators begin using the new "addressable" home terminals, which enable them to turn off a customer from a central computer, the pay television industry will continue to be plagued by "theft."

Another obstacle to the expansion of pay cable audiences is the expense of installing new channels. Since the cable operator must make a costly service call to add new

LET A HUNDRED CHANNELS BLOOM

Because of their sheer number and variety, there is no easy way to categorize the new programming ventures that will soon find their way into many of America's eighty million television households.

Like those already in existence, the new cable channels will run on various schedules, from three or four hours per week to twenty-four hours per day. Some will require consumers to pay a separate fee—the pay television approach. Others intend to earn their profits from advertising, sometimes supplemented by payments from the cable operators who use the programming.

As to format and content, the new channels continue the industry's trend toward specialization in programming. For a time after national cable programming began in 1975, most of the services, like HBO and the WTBS superstation, were aimed as broadly as possible in order to take viewers away from the broadcast networks and local independent broadcast stations. Very soon, however, new ventures cropped up—Cable News Network, Nickelodeon, ESPN (Entertainment and Sports Programming Network), for example—which offered "vertical" programming. They sought to build viewer loyalty by offering continuous programming targeted at narrow segments of the audience, like children, blacks, Spanish-speaking viewers, Franco- or Anglophiles, sports or news fans, and senior citizens.

By 1980, there were nine national pay television services, five cable radio services, several data channels, three so-called superstations, a half-dozen religious networks, and some twenty special-

ized services featuring various forms of sports, entertainment, culture, news, and information.

Although many of the services announced in the past year continue to find new groups to which a "narrowcasting network" might appeal, there is a trend that will prove to be at least as significant for the fledgling enterprises that now exist. That trend is direct competition. With superior resources and determination, some large corporations have jumped into the fray with both feet, hoping they can outlast their competitors.

Here are some of the more interesting programming developments of the last two years:

Cultural. Three cultural programming services have been launched, two by broadcast networks. Another, from PBS, is still in the planning stages. Bravo, the first cultural pay network, was started by several cable companies in December 1980. ABC's Alpha Repertory Television Service (ARTS) began operation in April 1981 as a nightly complement to the daytime children's channel Nickelodeon, developed by Warner Amex. ARTS is an ad-supported network, although relatively few ad slots have yet been sold. CBS Cable, a twelve-hour nightly service, began October 12. CBS, also seeking ads, has had modest success.

Adult. Two national adult movie channels, Escapade and Eros, are on satellite. Several others are currently distributed on videotape. Playboy Enterprises has joined with Rainbow Programming Services to create what will become the Playboy Channel. Penthouse is scheduled to offer its PET Network later this year. Although these and other soft-core services are a small part of cable's overall mix, they are popular and have received the lion's share of media attention.

News. With the announcement of two national, full-time satellite news channels, to be offered by partners ABC and

Westinghouse, news became one of the hottest battlegrounds in cable. Satellite News Channel I was launched in June and Satellite News Channel II is planned to debut in the spring of 1983. To counter this new competition, Ted Turner—the Atlanta sportsman and entrepreneur who owns WTBS, the Atlanta Braves, and the industry's first all-news channel—premiered Cable News Network 2 last December 31, and shortly thereafter began marketing a radio news service. C-SPAN (the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network) earlier this year expanded from a daytime service to a sixteen-hour channel. The network will add various public affairs shows to its regular coverage of the House of Representatives and hopes eventually to include Senate proceedings.

To the existing textual news services, like UPI Cable News, North American Newstime, Dow Jones Cable News, and Reuters News-View, CBS and AT&T will add an experimental videotext service called Venture One. This service will combine the broadcast network's editorial resources with the phone company's expertise as an "information provider."

Music. August 1981 saw the inauguration of Warner Amex's Music Television (MTV) pop channel. The twenty-four-hour stereo service features video deejays playing promotional rock tapes and also presents concerts, music industry news, and features. MTV, which has been highly successful in attracting advertisers, already has prospective competition, including the Nashville Network, Heartbeat Media, and the Apollo Entertainment Network, all planned for this year or next. Warner may start up a second music network. Meanwhile, several late-night services, such as Night Flight, have been introduced.

Service. Women's service programming was initiated in March by ABC and Hearst's Daytime. The new channel follows on the heels of a \$40 million commit-

pay channels, he is very careful in choosing them.

These business pressures will lead to "an inevitable shake out," says Richard Galkin, an owner of the Providence, Rhode Island, cable system and a prominent industry consultant. "The 'when' depends almost totally on how deep the pockets are at each new service. The pressures of breaking even, recouping investment, much less making a profit, will eventually be felt by all the channels. As a cable operator, I applaud what companies like CBS are trying to do by bringing original programming to the industry. But I just don't understand their economics. And if I'm worried for CBS, you can imagine how I feel about those that

What makes this high-stakes struggle so remarkable is the likelihood that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to determine the winners until most of the risks have been taken.

are less well heeled."

Well-heeled CBS, like most of the new cable gamblers, is optimistic. Charlotte Schiff Jones, who heads the CBS Cable marketing effort, admits that the company "is looking to turn around in four years. If

we break even in the third year, it would be marvelous, but our projections give us four years. That's when the cable universe will be large enough to support services for narrower tastes."

Even more enthusiastic is Michael Dann, a former broadcast network programmer, who worked on Warner Amex's Qube two-way system and is now advising ABC Video Enterprises. He flatly predicts that there will be "sixty full-time cable channels" in operation by 1984, and that monthly subscriber fees will be as high as \$150 per month by 1985. "We are constantly underestimating the revenues in cable."

In the final analysis, of course, the critical evaluation will be made by the oft-fickle American television viewer. Will

ment from Bristol-Myers for a health series, "Alive and Well," which is at the core of the USA Network's expanding daytime programming for women. The nonstop Weather Channel started in May, the Cable Health Network premieres on June 30, and at least two shop-at-home cable channels are expected later this year. Warner is planning a video-games channel, which will compete with Mattel's Play Cable, currently being test-marketed. Existing cable networks that feature various types of service programming include USA, SPN (Satellite Program Network), and MSN (Modern Satellite Network), among other alphabet-soup networks.

SPN, which currently operates a basic service that includes a variety of programs, announced this year that it will spin off four full-time channels in 1984. Each will feature elements now part of SPN—international programming, financial information, how-to information, and movies.

Cable Radio. Most people associate cable with visual services, but the medium is developing as a market for audio services as well. Some, like the Chicago classical station WFMT, are superstations. (Like their television counterparts, they are actually local stations distributed by satellite for use by other cable systems.) Others, like Lifestyle, are noncommercial audio services used as background music on cable weather channels and the like. As more and more cable systems offer hookups to home stereo systems, cable radio will come to include a National Jazz Network, Home Music Store (programming new record releases for viewers to tape), and, perhaps, National Public Radio.

Religious. The largest of all the religious services, CBN (Christian Broadcasting Network) is a family-oriented variety enterprise that programs soap operas, entertainment, and information. A Jewish net-

work—National Jewish Television, offered for three hours a week—and a Catholic service called the Eternal Word will join the four evangelical Christian cable services. In addition, Family Programming Network has announced a channel that will feature religious and other "wholesome" programming.

Ethnic. Programming aimed at specific national and ethnic groups has arrived. USA Network offers the English Channel, SPN distributes Telefrance, the Black Entertainment Network moved from USA Network to its own twenty-four-hour channel in May, and Spanish International Network was one of the original basic-cable networks. SPN now offers half a dozen different international shows from places like Ireland, Israel, and India, and has announced plans to create an international cable network by 1984.

One pay television venture never got off the ground. The all-movie Premiere network, announced by Getty Oil and four Hollywood studios in 1980, was ruled illegal less than a year later. But others have risen to take its place. In June, the Entertainment Channel, from RCA, was launched with a mix of cultural, variety, and children's programming. About fifty percent of its material will come from the BBC, with which it has an exclusive contract.

Times Mirror began its own Spotlight service last year. Before that, Time Inc. added a second service, called Cinemax, designed to be an all-movie complement to its "foundation"—Home Box Office. By fall 1981, the four largest pay networks were all full-time. Both HBO, with more than eight million subscribers, and number-two Showtime have increased their budgets for original programming.

In April, ABC announced the Home View Network (HVN), a movie-oriented service scheduled for a fall debut. The

new venture will transmit, from 2:00 A.M. to 6:00 A.M. daily, a mix of feature films and original programming directly to subscribers' homes through ABC's affiliated broadcast stations. By presetting videocassette recorders, subscribers can tape the programs while they sleep and play them back at their convenience. HVN will be the first service to link VCRs with pay television.

One of the most awaited entries into the pay cable business materialized in 1981, when the Disney organization announced the Disney Channel, begun in partnership with Group W and planned for launch late this year.

The next horizon for pay programming will be the so-called per-view networks, featuring single sports and entertainment events which viewers will pay for individually. An estimated one and a half million cable homes can currently participate in per-view, a number that will increase dramatically as new systems are built. Ventures for per-view programming have been announced or are being planned by broadcast networks, motion picture studios, and cable companies. To date, most per-view programming has been presented by over-the-air subscription services like ON TV in Los Angeles or by Warner's Qube in Columbus, Ohio.

Other recent programming announcements in pay suggest a trend toward specialty markets—children's programming (Kidvid Network); old movies (Nostalgia Network); classic broadcast television shows (Channeltainment). In addition to these new networks and specialized programming services (and probably a dozen more will be announced by the time you read this article), existing cable channels are adding new programming blocks or upgrading their present product line, partly to please an increasing number of advertisers.

All this should keep television viewers busy for a while.—N.D.

people regularly watch more than a handful of television channels? Will enough people watch narrowcasting networks to make them economically viable? Will advertisers shift from broadcast to cable? What is the upper limit that most families will spend per month for their cable bill? How long will new networks have to hold out for success?

It will take at least five years to answer these questions. In the meantime, the primary beneficiary of the explosion in cable networking will be the viewer. We are witnessing for the first time something approximating a competitive marketplace in television programming. The results, especially for those of us living in the cities that have yet to be wired, will be extraordinary.

So if it costs those corporate cable cowboys multimillions to compete for my eyeballs, like most television viewers, I am ready to say, "Ride 'em, cowboys."

Nick DeMartino is president of Signature Video Enterprises, a consulting, production, and distribution firm involved in cable, pay cable, and home video. He is coauthor of *Keeping PACE With the New Television*, published by the Carnegie Corporation.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Interactive cable could bring Big Brother a giant step closer.

Ben Brown

In *The Graduate*, Dustin Hoffman, in the early throes of his identity crisis, got one word of whispered advice on future opportunities—plastics. If the movie were made today, it would be two words—cable television. But there would still be an identity crisis.

For as wondrous as cable's potential is, there are numerous questions about the technology's ultimate applications and about the policymaking environment in which it's sure to thrive. Like the medium of television itself, the new-tech expansions of the tube are as apt to frustrate our attempts to come to terms with our problems as they are to help us solve them.

As the cable pot gets bigger, so does the ante. And the players tend to become fewer, larger, and more powerful. As the new-tech capacity for linking individuals and data banks increases, so does the capacity for collecting and abusing personal data about system users. Although it will be years before the evidence of the new

technologies' impact is in, these two issues—media concentration and privacy—already dominate the concerns of new-tech critics.

A decade ago, cable television was chiefly a community distribution service in areas that had trouble receiving signals from broadcast outlets. Now it's a major industry in its own right that has attracted a phenomenal number of buyers and sellers to a still-evolving marketplace, and has greatly expanded its own programming sources. The biggest and the richest among the communications conglomerates are battling for position. According to *Broadcasting* magazine's "state of the industry" report last November, the top ten cable companies, many of them part of large corporate entities, account for forty-four percent of all cable subscribers. The top twenty-five companies have sixty-one percent of the customers.

The corporate names are familiar. Time Inc. is the parent company of American Television & Communications (ATC), the second-largest multiple system operator (MSO). Time also owns the pay television services Home Box Office and Cinemax, which rank first and fourth in numbers of subscribers, and it's a partner (with two Hollywood studios) in USA Network, which has the sixth-largest subscriber list among the basic-cable services.

Then there's Westinghouse. It has an electronics-manufacturing division, and owns radio and television stations, a production company, and Group W Cable (the third-largest MSO). It's a part owner of Showtime, HBO's chief rival in the pay television field. And now there's Group W Satellite Communications, a partner with ABC, Walt Disney Productions, and the parent company of Opryland USA in launching satellite-delivered news, family-entertainment, and country music channels.

And other giants. Warner Communications and American Express got together to form Warner Amex Cable Communications, which is the sixth-biggest MSO. Broadcast and newspaper chains like Cox, Storer, Times Mirror, Knight-Ridder, and Newhouse are heavily involved in cable ownership and programming. And the three broadcast networks have already invested in nonbroadcast "software"—including videocassettes and videodiscs, as well as, for ABC and CBS, cable "culture" channels. Soon they may all own cable systems themselves.

It's a big-business fast lane, about to get faster as the federal government unleashes IBM and AT&T from long anti-trust tie-ups. The decisions, announced in January, surprised many industry and government insiders. Though it's too early to tell precisely what's going to happen, it's certain that the telecommunications marketplace, especially in computer-linked fields, will never be the same.

As far as the public interest advocates are concerned, things are already fairly serious. In a September 1981 report called *Regulating Cable Television*, the National League of Cities made the point: "This growth in concentration of media control may prevent cable from reaching its potential of making widely available a diversity of communication and information from different sources." Brenda Fox, general counsel for the National Cable Television Association (NCTA), acknowledges the trend toward fewer companies owning more and more of the action. But, she says, in cable "you don't have the kind of domination you have in the broadcast world... where there are only three big players. There are many more players in cable." Trygve Myhren, chairman of ATC, makes the same argument. "The new franchises," he says, "call for a hundred-plus channels; Time can program two and a third: HBO, Cinemax, and USA Network. If I have a hundred channels to fill, I'd be a fool to exclude anybody's programming simply because he was a competitor."

High-powered competition in an unregulated marketplace should inspire more mergers and partnerships in the short run, and unspoken territorial agreements down the line. To survive and thrive in the long haul, the players in the telecommunications game must find their own niches in which to protect themselves from profit-threatening competition. Many of them, in the spirit of the computer era, will "inter-face"—link together a system of systems making use of different technologies' unique advantages and guaranteeing each participant a share of the action.

The oldest enemies, broadcasters and cable operators, have always cooperated, if reluctantly—by virtue of the FCC's "must carry" rules, which require cable systems to carry local broadcast signals and feed them down the cable into subscribers' homes. Cable companies benefit from this by getting programming for their channels; broadcast stations, especially those with weak signals, benefit because fringe viewers can get better reception. In the future, there will be even more cooperation, with broadcasters programming whole cable-only channels and perhaps even sharing in the ownership of cable systems. An FCC staff study has already recommended that the commission drop its cross-ownership restrictions where broadcast stations and networks are concerned.

Although it was satellite technology that almost single-handedly launched the current cable revolution—by allowing cable operators instant access to Home Box Office and other programming sources—new ways to send and receive satellite signals are now threatening cable. Home owners can simply buy their own receiving "dishes" and receive the same programming regularly beamed to cable systems, broadcasters, and business customers. But that can call for a hefty investment—up-

wards of five thousand dollars.

Not so with the proposed direct broadcast satellite (DBS) service, which would deliver cable-style programming directly to subscribers. DBS dishes will probably cost two hundred dollars or less, and viewers will pay monthly charges—just as with cable. However, like low-power television and the multi-point distribution service, DBS seems to be just a gap filler. Viewers in sparsely populated areas are sure to be interested. But most of the proposals call for only about four or five satellite-delivered channels, with a monthly subscription rate roughly equal to cable; so in areas that already have state-of-the-art cable systems, DBS would merely provide extra pay services.

With its multichannel capacity, only cable television can accommodate just about everybody who has something to say—or more important, from an industry point of view, something to sell. And because the wire that links the cable “head-end” with subscribers’ television sets can also be a two-way, “interactive” stream, a host of two-way digital, textual, and data-transfer services are possible as well. That’s where the computers—and eventually IBM, AT&T, et al—come in. Connected by cable wires to subscribers’ home terminals, computers at the cable company’s headquarters can offer everything from legal research to Space Invaders. And interfaced with other computers, the cable system’s reach becomes limitless. Electronic mail, electronic newspapers (videotext), electronic data transmission, and funds transfers—all of this and more is being tested right now in American cable systems.

But there’s a problem. Computers remember everything. Computers can diligently record every programming choice, every product ordered, every request for information, every violation of home security, every medical emergency, every electronic memo. In the marketplace, that information has a value—to retailers, to advertisers, to politicians, and to government officials. It amounts to a computer-assembled dossier.

A recent article in *Channels* magazine sketches a chilling picture of what life in a totalitarian society equipped with interactive television might look like. Sets could be turned on at the government’s whim, transforming homes into semipublic places where citizens could be constantly monitored. The required technology already exists and is in operation in towns like Covington, Kentucky. Subscribers there willingly allow the local cable operator to hook their sets up to an emergency system that automatically turns on televisions to warn the community of impending hurricanes. The article suggests that this kind of system could be used to issue propaganda and ensure citizens’ attention by quizzing

Sets could be turned on at the government’s whim, transforming homes into semipublic places where citizens could be constantly monitored.

them afterward.

“One of the great dangers to freedom posed by the new communications system lies in this area,” writes John Wicklein in *Electronic Nightmare: The New Communications and Freedom*. “Since their inception, commercial and government computer data banks have outdistanced efforts by Congress and the public to regulate their use.” Who will control the data banks? And what rules will determine the release of computer-collected information about subscribers?

These questions are ultimately unanswerable. There is no federal law governing cable data collection. There have been, however, some attempts on the part of state governments to look into the problem. And some cable companies are issuing “codes of conduct.” But the bottom line is that much will depend on faith and consumer education.

New York was one of the first states to make an attempt at cable privacy legislation. Last January, New York attorney general Robert Abrams proposed a “study bill” that stresses the right of subscribers to control the use of cable-collected information about themselves. The bill would provide civil and criminal penalties for abuse of the data. Except for commercial transactions (using the cable system to order merchandise or services), no information regarding an individual could pass from the cable company to a third party without his prior consent. And subscribers would have access to all information about them.

Warner Amex, which has conducted the most extensive interactive-cable experiments (notably its Qube operation in Columbus, Ohio), has come up with a privacy code. It doesn’t have an “informed consent” clause, but it promises not to pass along any information identifying an individual subscriber. And it offers the same open-file privilege as suggested in Abrams’s proposal.

These are fine efforts, of course. But they rely, to a great extent, on the goodwill of the companies and their employees and the ability to resist the pressures of profit and politics. In the late sixties and early seventies, widespread government snooping on private citizens was motivated only by politics. The realities of the data-collecting, data-processing, data-exchanging world argue against blind faith. So what’s

the answer? David Korte, who advises municipalities on cable issues for the Cable Television Information Center, puts it this way: “The reality is that the new services are going to involve sending and consolidating information. Other than constant vigilance, there is going to be no perfect solution. [No law or code] will ever remove the risk of living in an information society.”

Brenda Fox of the NCTA thinks that the hand wringing over the privacy problem is premature. “There is a danger,” she offers, “in rushing to protect ourselves from a parade of horrors which may never occur.”

“I personally am a privacy freak,” she goes on. “I think it is important that we be conscious and sensitive. But this is one area where sensitivity on the corporate side is real. And it seems to me there are far better long-range opportunities to serve the public interest if you encourage self-regulation. This is a very consumer-sensitive business. If the cable system doesn’t provide what the people want, then one of two things happens. People stop paying or a competitive delivery system takes the customers away.”

Here’s what bothers the public interest people when they hear that argument: In the effort to keep an all-powerful government from sticking its nose into media affairs, we may end up with an all-powerful marketplace in which we have little say. In the marketplace, people are consumers—not citizens; it’s purchasing power, not “the public interest,” that counts. Under those circumstances, we influence the shape of the telecommunications future by either buying into or not buying into the marketplace. But unless we hold seats on the corporate boards, we won’t have much say about the long-range priorities of the process and its products. Which sounds a whole lot like the way television works right now.

What is new about the future, however, is the degree to which the video medium, connected to computers and coaxial cable, will extend to all the little nooks and crannies of our lives not already possessed by “M*A*S*H” reruns and “Eyewitness News.” And it will evidently do so without much official consideration from those who, up until now, have been accountable for protecting “the public interest” and conventional television.

Author John Wicklein warns about the danger of letting the new technology settle into old habits: There’s great potential in the evolving communications system, he says, potential “to make us freer and happier than we have ever been before. . . . But within the system lie serious threats to our privacy and our individual liberties. These will very likely materialize if we permit it to be guided primarily by market manipulations, military demands, and political-power considerations.” ■

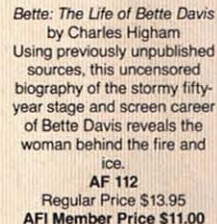
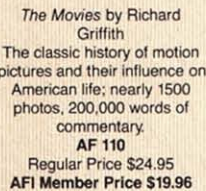
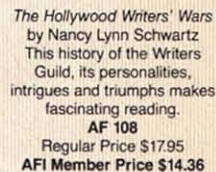
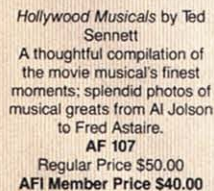
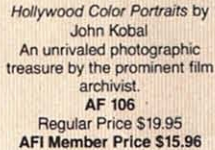
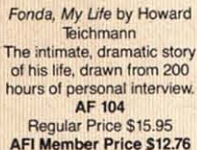
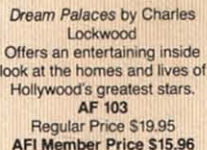
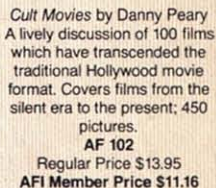
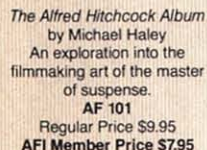
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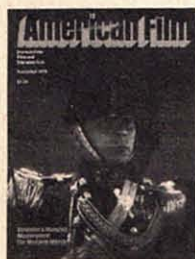


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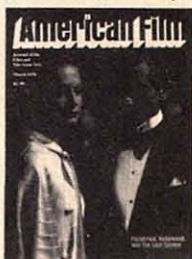
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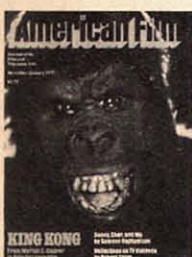
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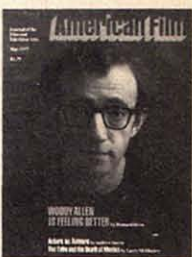
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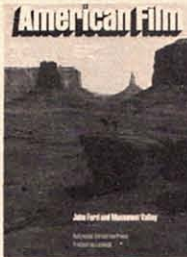
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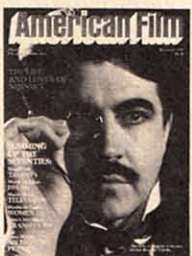
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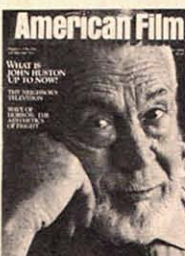
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FLASHBACK

from page 36

point out was some time ago, perhaps in the midst of the dinosaur era . . ."

He paused. There came a murmur of amusement from the audience.

"... I, too, graduated from that benign institution we all know and revere, founded by Elihu Yale, when he bequeathed his library to the welfare and edification of future generations. . . . Matter of fact, some of us even went *into* that library, once or twice, during our stay at Yale, believe it or not." Another murmur of laughter.

"Now, since I lay claim to being the oldest living graduate of Yale in this room tonight . . . and since I come from a generation which went to Yale for the express purpose of . . . Getting Ahead in Later Life . . . Oh, yes, my friends, that's the truth. It's why our parents got up the tuition in those days . . . and now, forty years or more later, after two world wars and Lord only knows how many world upheavals, pestilence and famine and what have you, you, sir, have assured us Yale has changed with the times. . . . But the one question that's uppermost in my mind, I being a very old party who needs a certain amount of reassurance each day . . . is . . ."

He paused.

Up on the dais, Brewster stood, politely saying nothing, awaiting the body of the question. So did the rest of the somewhat bemused alumni assembled.

"... is," said Don, "are we teaching undergraduates anything at all, or is Yale—which I still love and admire, mind you, even though it may not love and admire *me*—still strictly a place to go to where you can meet people who will Get You Ahead in Life? I truly hope not. Reassure me, sir."

"Mr. Stewart," said Brewster, "I think I can reassure you. Yale has come almost as far as *you* have in recognizing its obligation to future generations, rather than to the material values."

There was applause, which grew in volume. Don beamed, turned and nodded to the assemblage, and finally sat down.

The following day, my telephone rang. "Hello, toots," said Don. "How are you?"

"Fine," I said. "And what about you?"

"I think when I have a little more black coffee, I'll be fine," he said. "But I don't remember anything about last night, isn't that strange? Ma says I came home and went right to bed, but I don't know what happened at the banquet. I do have a vague recollection of asking Kingman Brewster a question. Toots, tell me the truth. Did I say

anything to offend anyone last night?"

"You certainly did not," I assured him.

There were fewer visitors to 103 Frogmal as the years passed. But my wife and I continued to visit each time we were in London. In the late afternoons, we'd sit in the living room beneath the photographs of absent and departed friends and catch up on conversation. Ella, visibly older and bent precariously sideways from arthritis, would still insist on a ritual party, complete with food. She would pass out helpings of cake, some of which was of indeterminate age and could barely be sliced. Don, beaming cheerfully, would lean over to whisper, "Cake's lovely, but we really ought to have some wine, don't you think?"

On one of our last visits, he proudly presented me with a paperback copy, newly reprinted in America, of his early book *Mr. and Mrs. Haddock Abroad*. In the downstairs hallway, we said fond auf Wiedersehens—never good-byes. "Come back and live *here*, please?" insisted Don. "Connecticut is so far away. Besides, all talented Americans should stay in London."

In the summer of 1980, Ella suffered a crippling stroke. Later we received a letter from a close friend, who gave this report:

"She was cared for at home and got progressively weaker, yet every time I rang the house, she answered the phone first. It was difficult to understand her, but always she got to that phone—typical, no?"

"Then Don had a heart attack, and the doctor decided he should be cared for in his own home by the family, which had all rallied round. Nobody told Ella Don wasn't well; by that time she was almost out of it. Mercifully, the two of them, without knowing about the other's condition, died within forty-eight hours of each other."

"After their deaths, there was a gathering of old friends in Ella's garden, and many people came, all friends this time. Among them was Kingman Brewster. Telegrams from all over—Albee, Jules Feiffer, all their good friends. Then Pete, Ella's son, told us this lovely story. Don was resting in his room when a replacement doctor came in to see him—their own was away—and this new doctor was a lady, and attractive, as well."

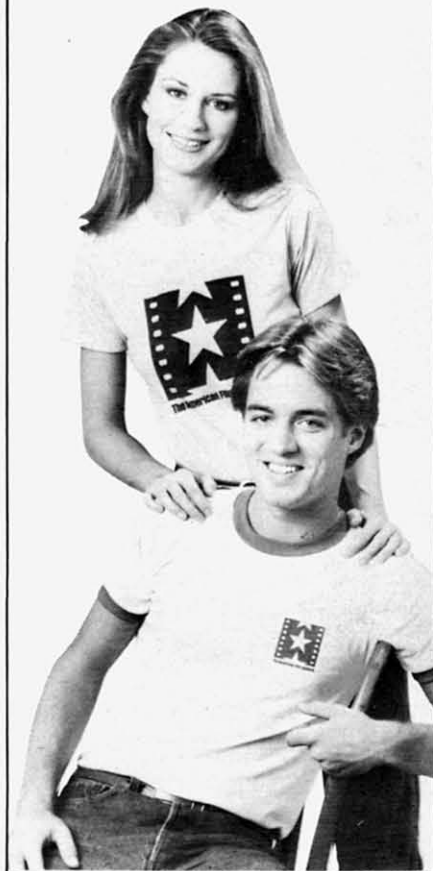
"As she entered his room, Don looked up at her and then he started to sing 'I Want to Be Loved by You' . . . and then he died."

As any seasoned dramatist knows, a good exit line is one of the most difficult to supply. When it came to his own departure, Don, as always, came up with a nifty. ★

Max Wilk's most recent book is *Represented* by Audrey Wood, a biography.

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Nothing But a Man, *Alambrista!*, and *Short Eyes* — in the course of a twenty-five-year career, the director has made everything from ethnographic films to network documentaries to Hollywood features. But his best work has focused on the poor and the dispossessed.

Robert M. Young's Ordinary People

Gerald Peary

In 1901 Texas, a poor Mexican-American named Gregorio Cortez shot a sheriff. Pursued by zealous Texas Rangers, Cortez rode toward Mexico, but when he reached the border, he stopped, allowed himself to be arrested, and was placed on trial in Texas, his "homeland." Cortez's decision to stand up for his dignity is popularly regarded as the inauguration of twentieth-century "Chicano consciousness." When his case came to trial, Mexican-Americans sang in the streets, "To catch Cortez is like trying to catch a star." The ballad, "El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez," lingers on jukeboxes throughout the Southwest and is the inspiration for an ambitious bilingual film, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*—part Peckinpah, part *Rashomon*—to be aired over PBS on June 29, prior to theatrical release.

Behind the film is an unlikely collaboration between two Mexican-American organizations—Moctezuma Esparza Productions in Los Angeles and the National Council of La Raza in Washington, D.C.—and a fifty-seven-year-old Jewish director from New York named Robert M. Young. Although Young can barely understand Spanish, he brought to the production of Cortez's story a lifetime of turning society's outcasts into quiet film heroes.

"I gravitate toward the Other," Young

said recently, while in Boston on a visit. "I'm very middle-class, but I've felt like an underground person in a way. I want to give a voice to the ordinary man who isn't recognized. All my stories are the same. They're about people to whom life gave a raw deal. But they're not losers. They have dignity."

During the past twenty-five years, Young has quietly earned a reputation among his peers as one of America's premier independent filmmakers. He has directed everything from nature films and ethnographic studies to television documentaries and independent features. Along the way, he has picked up, among other awards, two George Polk prizes, a Peabody, an Emmy, and the Best First Film prize at Cannes.

Three Robert Young films—*Nothing But a Man* (a 1964 collaboration with Michael Roemer), *Alambrista!* (1977), and *Short Eyes* (1979)—are already regarded as classics of independent filmmaking: tough, complex looks at disturbing social issues, the kinds of movies Hollywood rarely dares to think about, let alone make. Yet Young is admired not only for the films he has made but for how he has made them, for how he has lived his life and managed his career, successfully straddling the perilous gulf between Hollywood

and the independent film community. Since his first theatrical feature, *Secrets of the Reef* (1957), he has been working regularly, selecting his own projects.

Despite the high regard Young is accorded in the independent film community, however, he is virtually unknown outside it. In 1979 a *New York Times* wire service story about him was printed in the Hong Kong *Standard*—accompanied by the beaming face of Marcus Welby.

Robert Young was born in New York City in 1924. The Russian-Jewish family name had been Youdavich, but was changed by his Uncle Joe, a lyricist who co-wrote "Dinah," "My Mammy," "Five Foot Two," "I'm Sitting on Top of the World," and other Tin Pan Alley hits. Bob Young's father, Al, was a film editor and co-founded Du Art Film Laboratories, which Young's brother, Irwin, now runs.

"I grew up around film," Young says. "My father gave me a splicer. I'd take family movies and edit them in strange ways. My father didn't want me to make films. He wanted me to go into the lab business, where I'd be secure. I wanted to be an adventurer and go off to the jungles and rescue fair maidens in distress."

Instead, Young, a high school graduate

at fifteen, went off to MIT to study chemical engineering. But life among the test tubes and T-squares left him cold; he dropped out and joined the navy, spending two years in the Pacific as a photographer during World War II. "When I was twenty," Young recalls, "I had what only can be described as a 'conversion experience.' I was daydreaming in the Admiralty Islands. I had an illumination: I would make movies. I wanted to make movies that were *real*."

Back in Boston after the war, he enrolled at Harvard as an English literature major. Instead of novelists, he read filmmakers like Eisenstein, Grierson, and Pudovkin, and made his first *real* film. It was a 16mm vignette of the turtle crossing the road in *The Grapes of Wrath*. He shot it from the turtle's point of view and cut it to "The Rite of Spring."

After graduating in 1949, Young moved to New York and formed a business partnership with two Harvard pals, Lloyd Ritter and Murray Lerner. (Lerner later directed *From Mao to Mozart*.) They made two educational shorts, and supported their company by painting the Du Art facilities for fifty dollars a week each. The big break came when Young and his company were hired to make underwater shorts for Marineland in St. Augustine, Florida.

The Naturalist

With his first nature film, *Castles in the Sea*, Young was faced with a major theoretical question about documentary. Was it

legitimate to simulate ocean life in "studio conditions," a specially built tank at Marineland? Young decided that there could be "some kind of truth" in a documentary in which "you try to get animals to do what they do. You try to create the conditions under which things do happen, so that everything is as real as possible."

To demonstrate that a hermit crab with a tight shell will attack a tulip-shell snail to steal a more comfortable one, Young took the hermit crab out of its shell and put it in a smaller one. "I put him in his cave," he recalls, "and then placed a tulip-shell snail on the nearby sand. While I photographed, the crab went after the other shell. I had to tamper with nature. Otherwise, I would have had to wait five years for the situation to come along." So is *Castles in the Sea* fact or fiction? "It's fiction," Young says. "It becomes a story."

For five years, Ritter-Young-Lerner shot half-hour shorts for Marineland. Their best material, plus some new underwater photography, was edited into a feature, *Secrets of the Reef*, which opened theatrically in New York in July 1957.

Young's next break came when documentary filmmaker Willard Van Dyke took him to India and Nepal as a cameraman, where they filmed a tiger hunt for the television program "High Adventure With Lowell Thomas." Young has many stories from his India days, from the time he almost urinated on a live leopard to the time a charging elephant stepped on his tripod and broke it—while he was shooting.

But tales of India pale next to Young's crazy adventures, years later, on a film called *In the World of Sharks* (1966), for which co-director Peter Gimbel persuaded Young to return to the deep off Long Island.

"It could have been a macho film but isn't," Young says dispassionately, as we watch the documentary together. On screen, Young swims out of his underwater cage and into a school of blue sharks. While he and Gimbel photograph the sharks in front of them, others nip at their legs. They film and kick at the same time. A shark hits the camera with its eyeball. Was Young scared? "I can still remember trying to surface one day and bumping my head against a shark's belly. It felt like hitting a water bed."

Young's last nature film, *Search for the Great Apes* (1976), the first filmed record of orangutans in the wild, was shot in Borneo. This National Geographic television special almost ended his life. He contracted a still-uncharted disease, possibly from the apes, and ran a fever of between 105 and 106. For nine months, Young was too weak to handle a camera, but with the help of a Guggenheim fellowship, he did manage to write a script, which later became *Alambrista!*.

The Ethnographer

In 1970, Young lived for five and a half weeks in an igloo above the Arctic Circle—where the daily temperature ranged between thirty and fifty below—in order to film the last migration of the Netsilik Eskimo, a trek reminiscent of the one in Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*. The film, *The Eskimo: Fight for Life*, which won an Emmy in 1971, is filled with illuminating moments of Netsilik life—cooking, socializing, roughhousing, parents playing with their children. "Earlier filmmakers of Eskimo life had used zoom lenses and tripods," Young points out. "They were trying to be anthropologists and stay back. What they got were profiles. But when a man looked at his wife, I wanted to see his face and her face. I'd shoot *close*. I used the camera the way the Eskimos used the harpoon. They're hunters. I'm a hunter. Once they knew I was doing my job, they'd forget about me. I had a camera with three lenses, and I'd keep them all adjusted, all the f-stops set for the conditions. I'd shoot quickly, moving from wide lens to telephoto lens. Most of the time I shot with wider lenses so I could see the Eskimos in their environment."

Young has a philosophical reason for shooting his protagonists with a wide-angle

The essential Young hero: Edward James Olmos as an imprisoned and luckless Mexican-American in the new television film *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*.



Young likes to explain documentary as a kind of folk art; he wants the form of each film to be an analogue to the lives portrayed.

lens in almost all of his films. "With a telephoto, the characters flatten into their environments too much. A wide-angle lens gives you a figure who dominates the background. I prefer to say that my guy is the center of the world. Everything radiates from him."

Young likes to explain documentary as a kind of folk art; he wants the form of each of his documentaries to be an analogue to the lives portrayed. For *Eskimo*, he developed a structure that would parallel the daily life of the Netsiliks. He crosscut between the community of caretaker women at home in the igloos—noisy, laughing, social—and the hunter men out on the ice—silent, alone, waiting patiently for hours to catch a single seal.

Eskimo was made soon after cinema vérité had become an influential documentary movement, but Young does not think it falls into that category. "I never know what people mean by 'cinéma vérité,'" he says. "I assume they mean what's actually happening before the camera. But then you are going to edit. And what happens in editing? I think 'truth' means getting the scenes you need to get to see someone in the round."

The closest that he has come to a standard vérité documentary is *Children of the Fields* (1973), a record of several months in the life of a Mexican-American migrant family. Unlike most Young documentaries, it was shot with sync sound, chronologically, without crosscutting, and with no voice-over or music whatsoever; the film's spare style mirrors the austere life of the protagonists.

The Journalist

In 1960, Young became an associate producer and director for NBC's short-lived but well-remembered original "White Paper" series. His first project was *Sit-In*, filmed in Nashville, Tennessee, where blacks were trying to integrate a lunch counter. Because *Sit-In* was only the second "White Paper," Young was free to structure it to his liking. He applied his "folk art" definition of documentary to television reporting. "I wanted the structure itself to be a sit-in. The black kids who told you what was happening were 'sitting in' in people's living rooms. And when the violence occurred, I cut to the same kids being knocked off the stools in actual newsreel footage."

Young normally avoids narration, but NBC decided to use the voice-over by Chet Huntley. "It was intended just to give you the facts, to guide you into the experience so you could be oriented, not to tell you how to think or feel. That's OK. If the audience wanted to deny those kids, they could deny them."

Young next directed *The Hospital* for the "White Paper" series, and followed it with *Angola: Journey to a War*. "I was interested in revolution. I'm not sophisticated politically," he admits, "but I'd read Camus. I'm a humanist. My films aren't political in an agitprop way, though I always felt I should take a stand." With a black cameraman friend, Charles Dorkins, Young flew to the Congo on July 4, 1961. "I made contact with an Angolese rebel leader," he recalls, "and we had someone drive us to the Congo-Angola border. We were met by rebels with guns. At that time, no one had been in Angola from the outside. We walked four hundred miles, filmed along the way, and came back with the first inside story of the war. The Portuguese were very upset. They lodged a formal protest and said if I ever went to Portugal, I'd be put on trial."

Sit-In and *Angola* won George Polk Memorial Awards, but with *Angola*, Young ran into censorship trouble at NBC. He says he photographed two nose cones from American-made napalm bombs that had been dropped on Africans. When NBC excised the footage, it was an omen. Young's fourth "White Paper," *Cortile Cascino*, a slice-of-life documentary set in a Sicilian slum, was never shown on NBC. According to Young, the film was locked in a vault, the original negative destroyed; the network had leaked to the press that the documentary wasn't up to "NBC standards." Young still doesn't understand NBC's reaction. (In 1981, *Cortile Cascino* became available for rental through the Museum of Modern Art.)

The film was his first directorial collaboration with Michael Roemer, a filmmaking friend of Young's since Harvard days who is now a professor of film and American studies at Yale University. Roemer sees philosophical differences between him and Young: "I'm a deeply pessimistic person with a strong interest in potentially tragic situations. I work out of contradictions and conflicts, always divided against myself, though there is nothing wrong with that. I

couldn't be more unlike Bob. He's a 'can do' person. He has a very committed, absolutely wholehearted way of making films. It shows in the way he works. When we shot *Cortile Cascino*, Bob wanted to be in there with a wide-angle lens instead of outside with a zoom. But I insisted on getting one."

Cortile Cascino, Young's personal favorite of his films, presents a world more reminiscent of Buñuel's sardonic "documentary" *Las Hurdes (Land Without Bread)* than the usual wholesome—and hopeful—world of Bob Young. The people of this Palermo slum are forgotten, passed over by the world at large, as were Buñuel's mountain poor of rural Spain. And they do almost as little to improve their lot: Only several hundred residents of Cortile Cascino are registered to vote; the men join political parties because there are pool tables at party headquarters; and the most "committed" of the have-nots support the return of the Italian monarchy.

For the first time, grotesque things began to appear in front of Young's camera: cripples, preening mafiosi, a children's gambling den, ugly people haggling and fighting over bread handouts, animals being slaughtered—life literally at the garbage dump. And jobs? Children sort rags at thirty cents a day. Men weave Rapunzel-length rope out of hair gathered from the floors of barbershops. And yet somewhere out of this heap, the familiar, humane Young comes through; there is sympathy for the women at home, most oppressed of all by the masculine pecking order, yet still trying to put food on the bed. (There is no table.)

The Feature Director

Angry over NBC's handling of *Cortile Cascino*, Roemer and Young decided to try and make a low-budget independent feature. "We turned our energy to a film nobody could take away from us," Young says. "We wanted a story of someone standing up for his manhood." He and Roemer raised nearly \$200,000 from friends to finance their venture. For many months, the two filmmakers traveled the South in what Young calls "an underground railroad of black families," often staying with parents of the students who appeared in *Sit-In*. "We interviewed countless people, visited in cabins where no white family had ever set foot, got threat-

ened by white sheriffs." Then they wrote a script and began casting.

Nothing But a Man features an all-star ensemble of black actors: Ivan Dixon, Abbey Lincoln, Yaphet Kotto, Gloria Foster, and Julius Harris. The story focuses on the relationship of a proud laborer (Dixon) and a preacher's daughter (Lincoln) and their tribulations in the post-Civil Rights era South. Shot largely in southern New Jersey, it was released in 1964 to critical acclaim—and Michael Roemer and Robert Young were suddenly celebrities.

Today, Roemer, who directed the film, is probably less attached to this sixties set piece than Young, the coproducer, co-writer, and cinematographer. Sweet tempered and optimistic, *Nothing But a Man* seems quintessentially a Young project. One New York reviewer's description was, as it turns out, a perfect encapsulation of Robert Young's cinema: "The hero, Duff Anderson, is no militant, no troublemaker, no incipient Black Muslim. He simply has never been able to accept being called 'boy,' eating dirt. . . . The white men are shown realistically and plausibly—not as murderers but men ridden by tensions and traditions, as set in their roles as most of Duff's co-workers."

After *Nothing But a Man*, twelve years passed before Young's next dramatic feature. Besides making documentary films, Young encountered some personal and pro-

fessional crises. As he describes it, "I was becoming only Mike's cameraman. Also, my first marriage was breaking up. I made a psychic connection with my film partnership—I had to get away from both."

Young bought a motorcycle. He visited the Galapagos. He sat ten days with a yogi. He spent one day in Central Park shooting footage of Baba Ram Das, after three followers explained that they had "selected" him. And he started doing commercials. Temporarily, he got rich. "I stopped when I found myself counting how much money I'd made. A governor wanted me to do his campaign. I got an offer from Frank Perdue. I got sort of frightened." Then, in 1976, he got \$200,000 from Barbara Schultz of the "Visions" project at Los Angeles's KCET-TV to shoot his script of *Alambrista!*. Robert Young's first solo feature was released when he was fifty-three years old.

The years were obviously well spent, because in this ground-breaking story of the plight of illegal Mexican aliens, Young brought to bear everything he had learned and everything he believed. Roberto Ramirez (played with deep conviction by Domingo Ambriz) is the typical Young hero—the undemonstrative man of the people who bravely crosses the border from Mexico in search of a better life.

Thanks to Young's intense, expressionistic, hand-held technique, the perspective

jumps about madly, reflecting the disassociation this Hispanic feels in a foreign country. At times, Ramirez's epic journey resembles *Alice in Wonderland*. (Quite consciously, it seems: Young mentions a "Through the Looking Glass" quality" he tried to achieve in one draft of a more recent script.) Ramirez walks into a field and almost steps on a group of Chicanos, each one sleeping under a piece of plastic, like strange plant life. He walks into another field, and a dog (shot in wide angle, it appears to be some shaggy, supernatural beast) races at him and chases him up a tree. In contrast, the police and border patrol are photographed in long shot, with muted voices, so that they seem as mysterious to us as to the perplexed Ramirez.

While editing *Alambrista!* Young began *Short Eyes*, based on Miguel Piñero's gritty play about the murder of a prison inmate at the hands of his fellow convicts. (The cast included ex-cons.) "It came to me as a gift," Young says. "It began with another director. After a week, the crew and cast had rebelled. I know for a fact that he was told if he came back to the set he'd be killed. The director 'got sick.' Peter Sova, the director of photography, and Michael Barrow, a gaffer on the film, recommended me. Miguel Piñero saw a piece of *Alambrista!* I was editing. He said, 'This is the guy who is directing *Short Eyes*.'"

Young understood the militant feelings of the *Short Eyes* ensemble. They had done the play onstage, often they were the characters they portrayed, and they had a tremendous psychological investment in having it done right. In trying to make the film as authentic as possible, Young and the cast won over financial backer Curtis Mayfield, who had a small part in the film, and Mayfield's lawyer, who originally saw *Short Eyes* as an excuse to make another *Superfly*-type exploitation movie—cum-sound track package. The shooting schedule was expanded from four weeks to six, and certain cast and script changes were made to toughen the material.

To research the story, Young spent weekends in an abandoned wing of the Tombs, a New York City prison. "I read every piece of graffiti in every cell," he says. "I was all alone, locked in. When I needed out, I'd buzz. I'd go to Chinatown for dinner and come back." He considers the experience not unlike his work in documentaries: exploring a new culture. "I was like an anthropologist going into new territory. I went in the way I did with the Eskimos—that is, not to make excuses or rationalizations for any of the characters.

Nothing But a Man, with Ivan Dixon and Abbey Lincoln, was Young's first feature. It won him some acclaim, but not enough to rescue him from anonymity.



For *Short Eyes*, Young spent weekends in a prison, an experience not unlike his work in documentaries: exploring a new culture.

Excuses are condescending."

Short Eyes is Young's toughest film. Nothing is held back: the constant threat of rape, the ritual killing of the only middle-class white man on the ward. When his throat is slit, we hear the blood dripping on the floor—which may be one reason why *Short Eyes* has hardly been seen theatrically since its triumphant debut at the 1977 New York Film Festival. "People are afraid of it," Young says.

After *Short Eyes* came Young's brushes with Hollywood, *Rich Kids* and *One-Trick Pony*. It's a mistake to think that Young had resisted Hollywood. He just hardly thought about it. But he says that after *Alambrista!* he had offers from every studio. He held out for *Rich Kids*, from a script by Judith Ross about family life among the wealthy divorced set of New York City. Young, who has divorced and remarried and has five children, cares deeply about his role as a family man. Nevertheless, his interest in *Rich Kids* was not particularly personal. What appealed to him was the chance to do a comedy, a farce. The film received a few favorable reviews, particularly for Trini Alvarado's performance as a poor little rich girl, but slipped quickly from sight.

One-Trick Pony—written by Paul Simon, who played the lead, a sensitive rock star in an uncaring world—is the only movie in Young's whole oeuvre that he simply won't talk about. "Paul Simon is a very, very talented man. He should have directed the movie himself since he had such a stake in it," he says—and that's all.

Young is not bitter about the failure of his two Hollywood films—that wouldn't be his nature—but he is looking elsewhere for projects. When we talked in April, Young was trying to find moments during the days and nights of making *Gregorio Cortez* to work on the script of his next project, a film set in Guatemala today. "It's a story about people renewing themselves. Two of the main characters are priests. One has become a rebel and carries a gun." Young's co-writer is Blase Bonpane, a Maryknoll priest who served in Guatemala. Together, they submitted the script to an independent filmmakers' workshop at Robert Redford's Sundance Institute. It was accepted; Young and Bonpane are spending a month this summer in Provo, Utah, rewriting their screenplay with the help of "resource persons," in-house Hollywood professionals.

It's a switch from last year, Sundance's first summer, when Robert Young was a resource person himself.

And after that? Young wants to fulfill a longtime dream, to do *Birds of Paradise*, a tale about a woman ornithologist who discovers her unconscious on a psychic trip into New Guinea. It promises to be his most personal work. "My woman is possessed by her father the way I'm still trying to please my father, who has been dead since 1960. She meets a crocodile hunter. He's a dangerous man. She can't really fall in love with him. That's the way her father possessed her."

Will Young turn to more fiction films or further forays into documentary? He can't decide. "Fiction is in a way more attractive because you can create the scene you really should have in the documentary. But the excitement of the documentary is that reality always turns out different than your projection of it. Lots of things just aren't so, like Pirandello."

Young admits that in making features he

faces a problem common to almost every documentarian: "My films just don't go far enough. Take Preston Sturges's pictures. Look how far they go—you laugh or cry because of the contradictory elements. They can exist in a documentary, too, like in the show for inmates in Fred Wiseman's *Titicut Follies*. I don't think I see enough scenes that complex in my movies."

"To me the last scene in *Alambrista!*—where the Mexican woman is giving birth in America—is partly what I'm aiming for, but it would have been better if the scene had involved the hero, Roberto, too. The shower seduction of Cupcakes in *Short Eyes* is powerful, but that's Miguel Piñero's writing. I don't write that well. I like the sequence in *Alambrista!* where the Anglo tells the story at the lunch counter and Roberto doesn't understand a word. It's a successful scene. It comes alive. But these are only scenes. I hope someday to do a whole picture that is really good." ■

Gerald Peary writes about film from Boston.

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The Screenplay's the Thing

Jeanine Basinger

The latest additions to the Wisconsin Screenplay Series offer more nuggets from Warners' golden years.

Mildred Pierce, introduced and edited by Albert J. LaValley. **The Public Enemy**, introduced and edited by Henry Cohen. **Little Caesar**, introduced and edited by Gerald Peary. **Yankee Doodle Dandy**, introduced and edited by Patrick McGilligan. **I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang**, introduced and edited by John E. O'Connor. **Dark Victory**, introduced and edited by Bernard F. Dick. (From **The Wisconsin/Warner Bros. Screenplay Series**. General editor: Tino Balio. University of Wisconsin Press, \$17.50 each; paper, \$6.95.)

Reading screenplays is like reading recipes. Unless you're going to make one of them, where's the satisfaction? It just makes you hungry, and, as we all know, the thing on paper is not the thing consumed. Read screenplays to understand movies? Better to go out and watch them instead.

Thus I naturally approached the latest additions to *The Wisconsin/Warner Bros. Screenplay Series* with caution—and some suspicion. To my delight, I learned that the reading of screenplays can teach a person not only the stories films tell and how they tell them, but also the stories that surround their creation.

In 1969, United Artists donated its Warner Film Library—as well as its RKO and Monogram film libraries—to the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. This donation created a treasure for film study. Over the past few years, many fine articles and books have generated from the center, which has set a high standard for film scholarship. The screenplay series (which makes full use of all the research materials—films, press books, legal records, contracts, and advertising materials) is no exception. The series acknowledges that the thing on paper is not the thing filmed, and uses that fact as a foundation. Assuming readers know there is a differ-

ence, the editors proceed to amplify it.

These six books are typical of the entire series. Each contains a final shooting script (with every variance between that document and the actual film carefully noted). Information on similar films and lists of other works by the same artists are included. There are full production credits, frame enlargements (taken from 35mm prints), bibliographies, script notes—and for *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, even song lyrics. Each book contains an introductory critical section that provides an evaluation of the film both historically and aesthetically, plus valuable insights into the problems that needed to be solved before the film was brought to the screen.

Tino Balio, general editor of the series, has laid out the format, but has wisely refrained from forcing individual editors to rigidly adhere to it. Instead, they have been allowed to explore the unique circumstances surrounding the production of the movies. For *Mildred Pierce*, for instance, those circumstances turn out to be the frustrating attempts to bring James M. Cain's sprawling and complex novel under control—to pare it down and shape it into a streamlined film. The way that Ranald MacDougall kept *Mildred* a svelte heroine instead of a three-hundred-page fat lady is a story that all who want to adapt novels to screenplays should read.

Each book has its own special touch. *Little Caesar* contains an interesting section entitled “The Meaning of *Little Caesar*” in which Gerald Peary, an authority on early gangster films, places the movie in its historical context and explains why it has become the definitive gangster chronicle. Peary's thesis is that the early gangster films utilized the genre as emblematic of the hardships of the Depression era. *Little Caesar*, he suggests, both continues and heightens the drama of

a poor boy's personal isolation; a tragedy caused by the Depression, *Little Caesar* is the ultimate antisuccess story.

The Public Enemy, on the other hand, is developed by Henry Cohen into an example of how moviemakers found the means to subvert censorship restrictions, a necessity even in the pre-Code era. Cohen suggests that the way in which Warner Bros. both accommodated the Hays Office standards and managed to film a “beer and blood” gangster film fraught with sexual tension and violence is the real justification for studying the movie today.

The story behind *Yankee Doodle Dandy* is the practical, down-to-earth explanation of the sort of biographical hogwash Hollywood once loved to set to music. Patrick McGilligan compares George M. Cohan's real life with the mythologized version presented on screen—the version that Cohan himself wanted told, and that he more or less dictated.

I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang is probably the most famous example of social realism Hollywood ever produced. Released in 1932, it is as meaningful and trenchant today; it stands as a model of how to make real events work dramatically. As editor John E. O'Connor suggests, “Hollywood couldn't have dreamed up anything better” than the true story of Robert Burns, the two-time fugitive from a Georgia chain gang. “The task at hand was to put an already plotted story on the screen.”

O'Connor carefully delineates the various stages the script underwent to make an honest movie out of the basic facts of Burns's experiences. Interesting as that development is, however, the most fascinating portion of the essay lies in the details of Burns's actual escapes, subsequent life, and ultimate, hard-won pardon. O'Connor comments incisively on Burns's own rather maudlin book, on which the film was based.

In a truth-is-stranger-than-fiction twist, Burns recounted that after one escape from prison he happened to meet a former fellow chain-gang member on the street and sought his help. In the screenplay, this encounter is planned for; the chance meeting would have seemed too contrived for the film.

I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang, with its ambiguous ending, is endlessly fascinating to viewers. Its portrayal of political corruption and of an individual whose rights are trampled by a callous system has seldom been matched in honesty or dramatic intensity. If O'Connor's book disappoints, it is because readers inevitably will want more—more information, more depth, and, above all, more political analysis and insight.

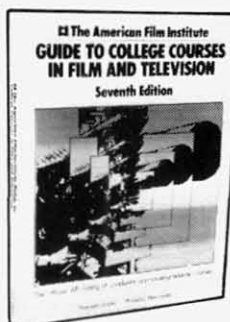
Bernard F. Dick's presentation of *Dark Victory* has a delightfully iconoclastic and witty approach—surprising, considering the lugubrious material. The original play, he says, "was a drawing room tragedy... unable to divorce itself from a setting that conjured up cocktails and canapés. Thus someone would have to toss off an occasional witticism to keep the gloom from settling over the furniture.... The madcap heiress was now terminally ill and the only way to live happily ever after was in the afterlife." Dick finds that the play was undistinguished and notes that after the success of the film, the play was altered to resemble its cinematic offspring.

Dick's thesis is that "like any film of the studio years," *Dark Victory* is enhanced by analyzing such factors as studio history, the star's career and persona, the source material, the problems of selling a film (in this case one about a dying woman) to a mass audience, and the internecine warfare that occurred during the production planning. Dick is at his best in analyzing Bette Davis. Just when you thought there was nothing left to say about her persona, he manages a fresh approach. "With Davis, toughness is vulnerability's twin, like a diptych whose panels fold in on themselves rather than open out." Had Dick more space, he might have pursued that idea in relation to many other American film actresses, like Barbara Stanwyck and Jane Fonda.

The brevity of the introductory essays in these books is the single flaw of the series. Bernard Dick has ideas of such depth and originality that, excellent though his introduction is, the limitations of space harm his case. For instance, his brief discussion of "the wom-

Continued on page 76

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Andrew Sarris: "... film histories never seem to be built on the foundations of earlier film histories."

BOOKS

from page 73

an's film" and its place (or lack of place) in genre requires more development to become valid. Dick observes that except for *Dark Victory*, no woman's film has had a heroine willing to master the art of dying; another reading of the genre is that life's limitations make those heroines powerless, passive, and thus, metaphorically, already dead. It is life the woman's film has to struggle toward, and that is the myth or meaning the genre provides for its viewers. The implications of Dick's essay go considerably beyond the film he introduces. His essay is simultaneously the most satisfying and, because of its brevity, the most frustrating.

All six of these books are of interest, but the best is Albert LaValley's *Mildred Pierce*. His introductory essay is the most detailed and developed, and clearly describes the contributions to the final film made by the director, producer, screenwriters, designers, and, of course, the star.

His discussion of the original novel is excellent, and his knowledge of film genre is impeccable. His sense of *Mildred Pierce* as an amalgam of film noir, woman's film, and typical Warner Bros. social realism enriches one's understanding, not only of the film itself but also of genre.

There has never been a good book on the tension between business and art in the studio system. Although everyone knows film is a collaborative art, no one has demonstrated clearly how, in the old days, directors, producers, stars, writers, and others made their particular artistic ways inside the great filmmaking corporations. The story of how it all worked—of how properties were found, selected, shaped, reworked, argued over, cut and recut, and dominated by certain artists—has not been told. As I read these six books, I suddenly realized that reading them consecutively would give us, at last, the story of old Hollywood and the studio system. These screenplays, with their introductory essays, may add up to the only really good book

ever written on how the studio system functioned.

Jeanine Basinger is a professor of film at Wesleyan University.

In Search of Film History

A History of Narrative Film by David A. Cook. Norton, \$24.95. **Anatomy of the Movies**, edited by David Pirie. Macmillan, \$15.95. **The Movies** by Richard Griffith, Arthur Mayer, and Eileen Bowser. Revised and Updated Edition. Simon and Schuster, \$24.95.

Andrew Sarris

A problem I encounter as both a journalist and an academic, and as both a reader and a writer of film histories, is that film histories never seem to be built on the foundations of earlier film histories. The bibliographies and footnotes may become more copious with each passing year, but no film historian who wishes to please a publisher can assume that any portion of film history has become common knowledge. And who is to say that it has?

David A. Cook, who teaches film and literature at Emory University, has done an admirable job of recapitulating much of the scholarship of the past half century. Indeed, *A History of Narrative Film* is one of the most lucid and most comprehensive texts I have encountered for a college-level introductory course in film history. The author is particularly skillful at steering a middle course between the sociological historians, who ruled the roost in the English-speaking world until the fifties, and the style-and-genre specialists, who have been dominant ever since. Cook also wisely avoids the challenge posed by the structuralists and semioticians by virtually ignoring their existence.

Nonetheless, the book is stretched very thin by the author's conscientious effort to link the beginnings of film with the medium's most recent meanderings. And despite the modifier in the title of his text, he seldom zeroes in on narrative as a cinematic end-all. Instead, he follows in the traditional paths of the multifaceted his-

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torians with their abiding interests in the technology, sociology, and economic structure of the movies.

I cannot really quarrel with Cook's balanced view of his vast subject. There may be a time and place for polemics, but not at the introductory level of a classroom filled with baffled faces that constitute nothing less than a vast tabula rasa. Certainly, one cannot understand the Bazinian revolution in film aesthetics until one has witnessed Eisenstein's theories in practice. With the past becoming ever more nebulous to the contemporary student, *A History of Narrative Film* represents a noble effort to endow film studies with more than a modicum of historical perspective.

As for the future, Cook sounds a commendably cautionary note: "To understand the true genius of Griffith, or Eisenstein, or Renoir, or Welles, or any other seminal figure in film history, we must think ourselves back to the technological limitations of their times, the limitations which they transcended to create an art of the moving photographic image. . . . Otherwise, someday in the not-too-distant future, as we sit before our wall-sized holographic television screens and watch images of unprecedented sensory refinement dance before our eyes, we will be tempted to forget how very much we owe these pioneers—not only for creating and structuring our most technological of art forms, but for keeping that form meaningful, significative, and humane. Unless that commitment to the humane can be maintained by succeeding generations of film and video artists, the audio-visual environment of the future is likely to be as cold and alien as the landscape of the moon in 2001."

Anatomy of the Movies is not primarily a history, although it does feature an extensive section, "Anatomy of the Movies All-Time Hit Lists," that is divided into such genres as Westerns (written by Richard Combs), thrillers (Christopher Wicking), romance (Cynthia Rose), comedy (Dilys Powell), musicals (Geoff Brown), horror (Tom Milne), science fiction (John Fleming), action-adventure (Joel W. Finler), drama (Gilbert Adair), and, most provocative of all, failures (David McGillivray).

The bulk of the book, which has been edited by David Pirie, is more an anatomy of the film industry in the late seventies than a history of any particular period. The material, much of it in the form of testimonials, is divided into four main chapters, entitled "The Money and the Power," "The Creators," "The Craft," and "The

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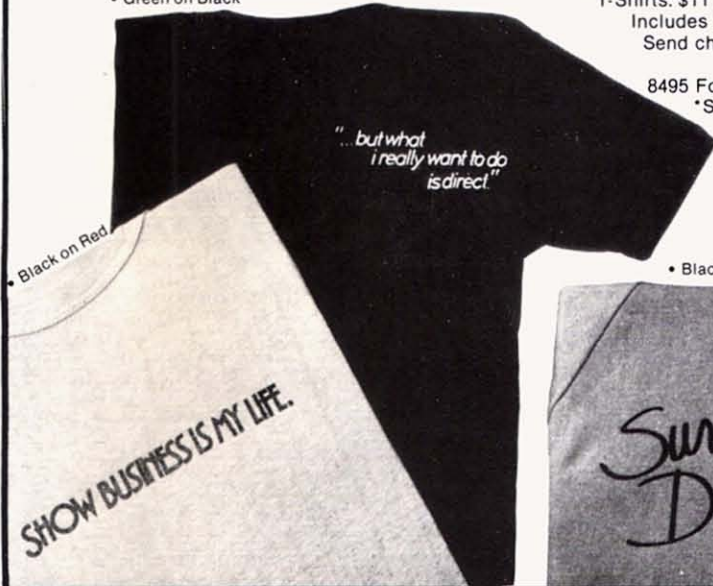
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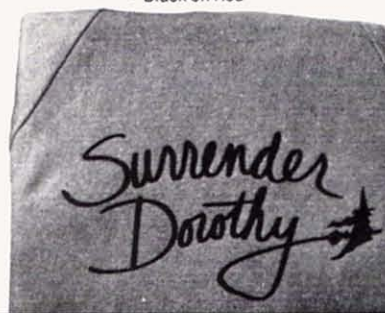
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Product." The contributors cover a wide spectrum of British and American movie criticism and journalism of the kind, like the old French *Cahierism*, that is always edging toward the process of filmmaking, instead of standing back with scrupulous detachment. The overall theme is one of optimism and accommodation.

Pirie even throws down a gauntlet of sorts in his introduction: "This book is not primarily concerned with personal movie preferences, or with criticism. But after a decade which has given us films as varied and interesting as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Chinatown*, and *American Graffiti*, it takes a near-comic perversity to state, as James Monaco does in his book *American Film Now*, that so far as movies are concerned 'the seventies have no culture of their own' and that Hollywood has suffered from 'a self-induced paralysis.'"

I, for one, do not feel that *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* suggests that the cinema has advanced appreciably since *Sunrise* or *Citizen Kane* or *Madame de*. Quite the contrary. I am beginning to wonder if at some point film history will simply stop, even in the midst of ever grander deals and profits. Of course, we may be dealing here with a king-size generation gap. I estimate that most of the contributors to *Anatomy of the Movies* are considerably younger than I am, and less addicted to nostalgia for the popular entertainment of bygone decades.

For many nostalgia buffs, one copious picture book is worth a thousand scholarly texts on film. *The Movies*, described on its glossy dust jacket as the "Revised & Updated Edition of the Classic History of American Motion Pictures," represents the combined tastes of Richard Griffith and Arthur Mayer (one of the "witnesses" in *Reds*), both deceased, and of Eileen Bowser, who is a curator of film at the Museum of Modern Art, an institution that has exercised a considerable influence on the writing of film history.

On the whole, I suspect Bowser of a moderating influence on the condescendingly dogmatic tastes of Griffith and Mayer. Griffith and Mayer, with their archival and publishing connections, did as much as anyone to keep American movies in their place as Hollywood fun shows, good for a chuckle now and then, but not really worthy of serious study. The stills are marvelously evocative as always, but I much prefer the detailed enthusiasms in *Anatomy of the Movies* to the often-supercilious captions in *The Movies*. 

Andrew Sarris is the film critic for the *Village Voice*.

An Officer and a Gentleman



In the navy: Richard Gere.

The success of *Taps* and *The Great Santini* has proved that films with a military milieu have more than a fighting chance at the box office today. Here, Richard Gere plays a navy pilot trainee who's wrestling with his father's legacy as a swab who was neither an officer nor a gentleman. Debra Winger is the love interest; she and Gere should strike enough sparks to start a major conflagration in most theaters. Directing is Taylor Hackford, who is coming off his debut with the underrated *Idolmaker*. Originally planned for a fall release, this one has been moved up on Paramount's schedule, usually a sign of a movie too hot to hold on to for long.

A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy

From the title, you might expect this to be a porn rip-off of Shakespeare, but it's actually the latest from the new, mellower, post-*Stardust Memories* Woody Allen. Forget the autobiographical angst; Woody's newest is a romantic comedy set on a country estate during a turn-of-the-century summer weekend. Three couples mix and mingle, *La Ronde*-style, with the emphasis on gemütlichkeit. The players are Woody, Mia Farrow, Mary Steenburgen, Tony Roberts, Jose Ferrer, and Julie Hagerty. Nice to have you back, Wood Man.

The Pirate Movie

No, this isn't *The Willie Stargell Story*, but a rock version of *The Pirates of Penzance*. (For those who insist on having their

Gilbert and Sullivan straight up, a film of Joseph Papp's recent stage production will be out at Christmas.) This version, filmed in Australia under the direction of British veteran Ken Annakin (*Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*), features Christopher Atkins and Kristy McNichol as the leads, with Gary McDonald, Bill Kerr, Maggie Kirkpatrick, and Ted Hamilton in support. But what's *The Pirates of Penzance* without Gilbert and Sullivan? Well, you might say, the very model of a modern major motion picture.

Young Doctors in Love

Two summers ago, Paramount hit box-office heights with a low-budget takeoff on disaster movies called *Airplane!*. This summer, Fox is hoping for healthy returns by cutting up television soap operas. The film is *Young Doctors in Love*. Directing is television sit-com king Garry Marshall, and he has grafted a cast composed of one part fresh young faces (Michael McKean, Sean Young), one part old pros (Dabney Coleman, Harry Dean Stanton), and two parts surprise cameos (a blend of "General Hospital" regulars and professional celebrity look-alikes). For Fox, it could be just what the doctor ordered.

The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas

Film versions of hit Broadway musicals have been as scarce in recent Hollywood as drawing room comedies, but *Whorehouse* (along with *Annie*) may reverse this trend. Of course, in this case it helps to have Dolly Parton playing the madam, with Burt Reynolds as her ex-lover and the now-sworn-to-do-his-duty sheriff. The producing/directing team behind the successful

Foul Play, Thomas Miller and Edward Milkis/Colin Higgins, are in the saddle for this one, and the supporting cast includes Dom DeLuise, Charles Durning, and Jim Nabors (you were expecting John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, and Laurence Olivier?). With ingredients like these, it seems to be not a question of hit or miss, but *how big* a hit *Whorehouse* can be.

Creepshow

Baseball's All-Star Game is on July 13 in Montreal; seventeen days later, opening in theaters around the country, is this summer's All-Star Horror Movie. The lineup: Stephen King, screenwriter; George A. Romero, director; Richard Rubinstein, producer (he worked with Romero on *Dawn of the Dead*); Tom Savini, makeup effects (also a *Dawn* veteran). *Creepshow* revives the old anthology format, a la *Dead of Night*, with five tales of terror featuring, among others, Hal Holbrook, Adrienne Barbeau, E.G. Marshall—and Stephen King. Word has it the story involving Marshall will do for cockroaches what *Willard* did for rats. Definitely not for the faint of heart.

Night Shift

Are you ready for a Ron Howard-Henry Winkler reunion? No, it's not a television special called "Happy Days Are Here Again"; it's a comedy called *Night Shift*, and Howard is directing Winkler, not starring with him. In Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandell's script, Winkler plays the night manager of a morgue that is a front for a call-girl service. It's not certain if this film will wind up on a double bill with *Best Little Whorehouse*, but we do detect a trend.



Not to be mistaken for a sorority house: Dolly and the girls.

"Art Alone Can Solve Social Problems..."



From *Mephisto*.

When the nominations for this year's Academy Awards were announced, almost everyone predicted that Poland's *Man of Iron* would be a shoo-in for Best Foreign Language Film. The majority of film buffs were convinced that the immediacy of the film's subject—the Gdansk shipyard strike of 1980—and the considerable talent of Andrzej Wajda were an unbeatable combination in this country, where both the Left and Right were proclaiming their solidarity with Solidarity.

Although the other four nominees—*Muddy River* (Japan), *The Boat Is Full* (Switzerland), *Three Brothers* (Italy), and *Mephisto* (Hungary)—were all films of exceptional quality, *Man of Iron* was the heavy favorite. The second-guessers penciled in the Polish nominee on "home ballots" torn from newspapers and, at AFI, on the Xeroxed sheets for the office pool that signal Academy Award week here as surely as the weekly game listings herald football season in most of the nation's offices.

It took the majority of sages by surprise—including the film-smart AFI staffers, who were virtually unanimous in projecting a Polish win—when István Szabó's *Mephisto* was voted the best foreign film of the year.

The wider distribution of *Man of Marble* at the time of the Academy Awards was one reason for the surprise when *Mephisto* won. But the more important reason was that we expected political realities, as much as the quality of the nominated films, to dictate the competition's outcome.

But they didn't, which may say something about how we are pulling away from topics that have been given a media blitz and leaning toward topics that have to do with essential human experiences: coming of age, coming to terms, coming back to our roots—subjects that are informed more by the heart than by the network news.

Hungarian cinema, as much as any in the world now, reflects this fascination with human experiences and interactions, and *Mephisto* is among the best examples of this filmmaking sensibility. It's about Nazi Germany, but it's more about opportunism and ambition—the political realities of its time and place are most clearly felt through the characters with whom Szabó populates his film. Although few Hungarian filmmakers have created works as brilliant as *Mephisto*, most have a distinct affinity with the "exposition through character" that Szabó employs—a difficult mode—and most display an equivalent degree of technical expertise.

The renaissance of Hungarian cinema dates from the early sixties with the appearance of shorts and features by young filmmakers who, having graduated from the Academy for Cinematographic Arts, began working together at the self-governing Béla Belázs Studio. At the academy, students are pro-

vided with excellent facilities with which to learn their craft and given a rigorous curriculum that includes mandatory study of scriptwriting and cinematography. The versatility this training fosters is evident in the fact that Hungary's best-known directors, when not working on their own films, act as screenwriters, cameramen, or editors on the projects of other directors.

At the Béla Belázs Studio, academy graduates forge their critical and aesthetic skills making low-budget experimental films that are free from the bureaucratic pressures accompanying "serious" production in a state-run film industry. And, indeed, the Ministry of Culture (which funds the studio, but does not interfere with its projects) seems to display little enthusiasm for the kind of doctrinaire "message films" often associated with government-funded arts in Communist countries.

"The political man is finally beginning to lose his all-powerful position," said Hungary's deputy minister of culture, Dezső Tóth, early this year. "Art alone can solve social problems that are beyond logic. One of the most serious dilemmas we face is the disturbed relationship between men and women. It pervades our lives." Hardly what one would expect to hear from an Eastern bloc government official, Tóth's words are reflective of the kind of "human vision" that characterizes Hungarian cinema.

Working with a degree of freedom unknown elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Hungarian filmmakers are capable of diverse cinematic expressions, and all of them touch something that is universal, rather than national. The personal stylized vision of Zoltán Huszárik, the Cassavetes-like realism of Peter Gothár, the feminist concerns of Márta Mészáros and Judit Elek, and the character studies of Szabó, Károly Makk, and Zoltán Fabri affect audiences in Boston as well as Budapest.

The hope we can draw from the recent rise of Hungarian film is that human concerns, rather than political dogma, is what filmgoers ultimately find worthy of embracing. If this is the beginning of a trend, then film really may have a chance to be a medium that transcends national boundaries.

Sean Lusterberg

THE HITS KEEP COMING.



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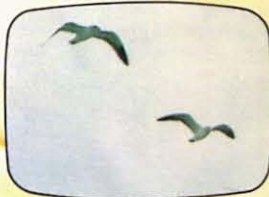
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